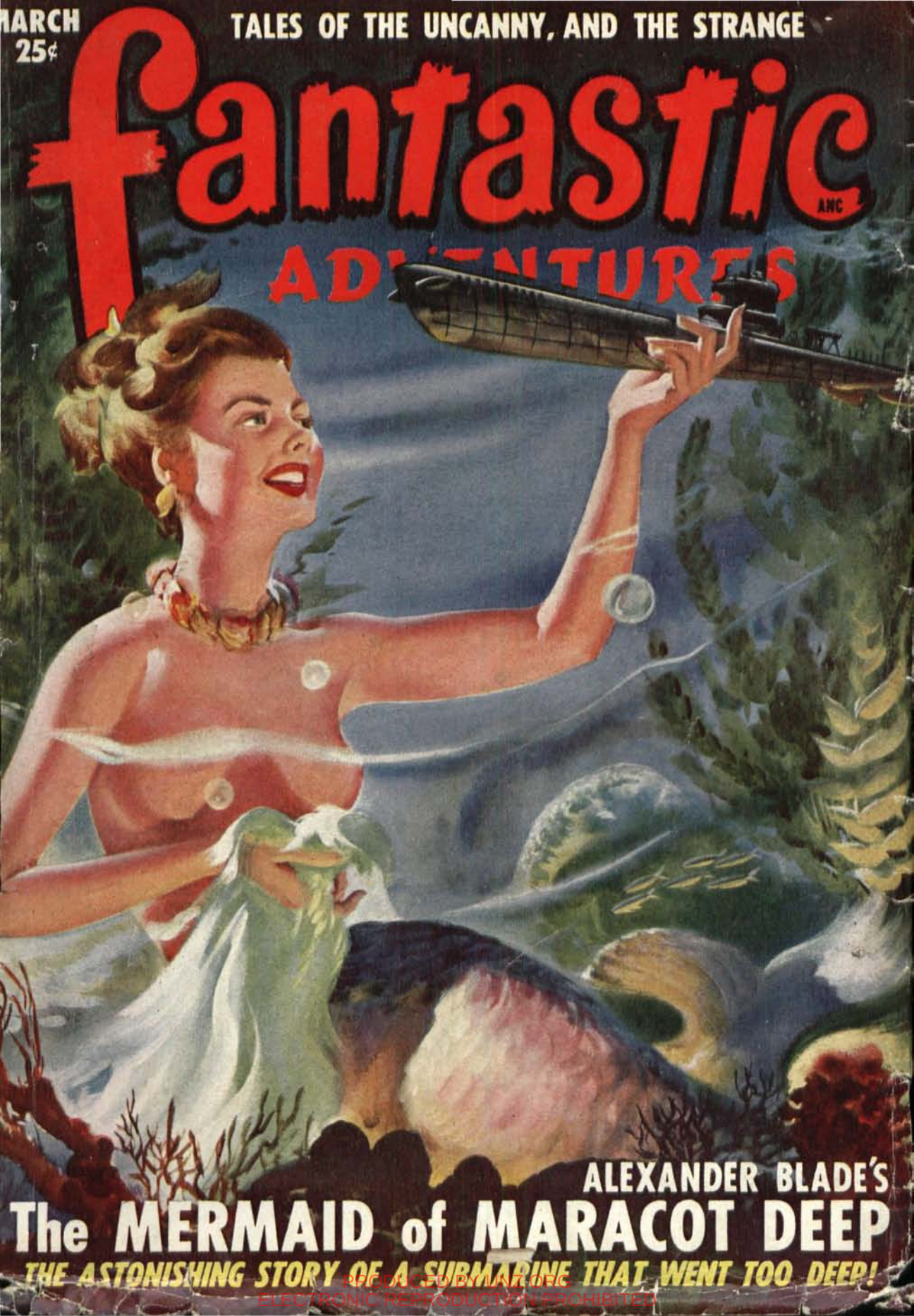

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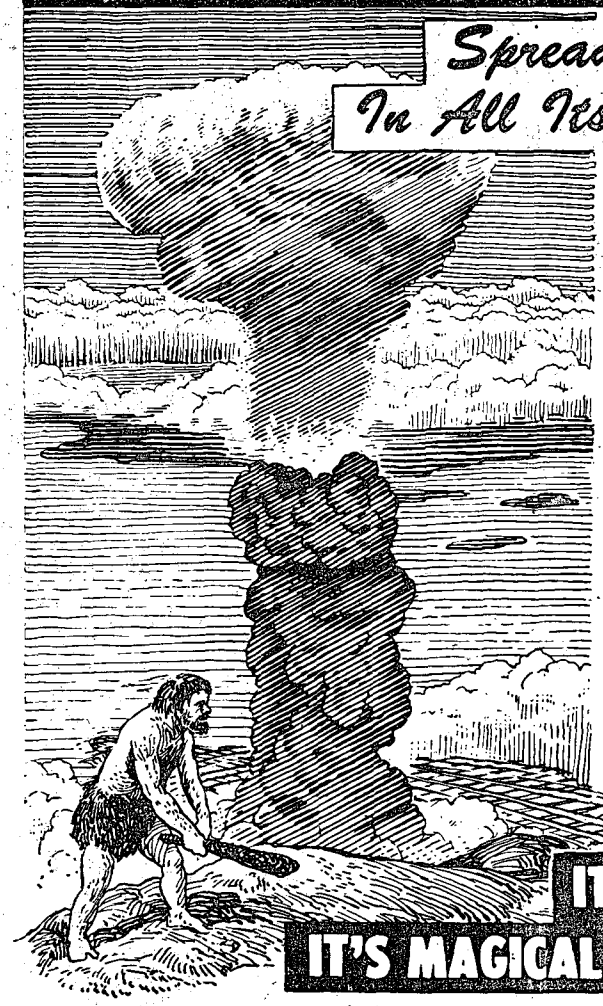

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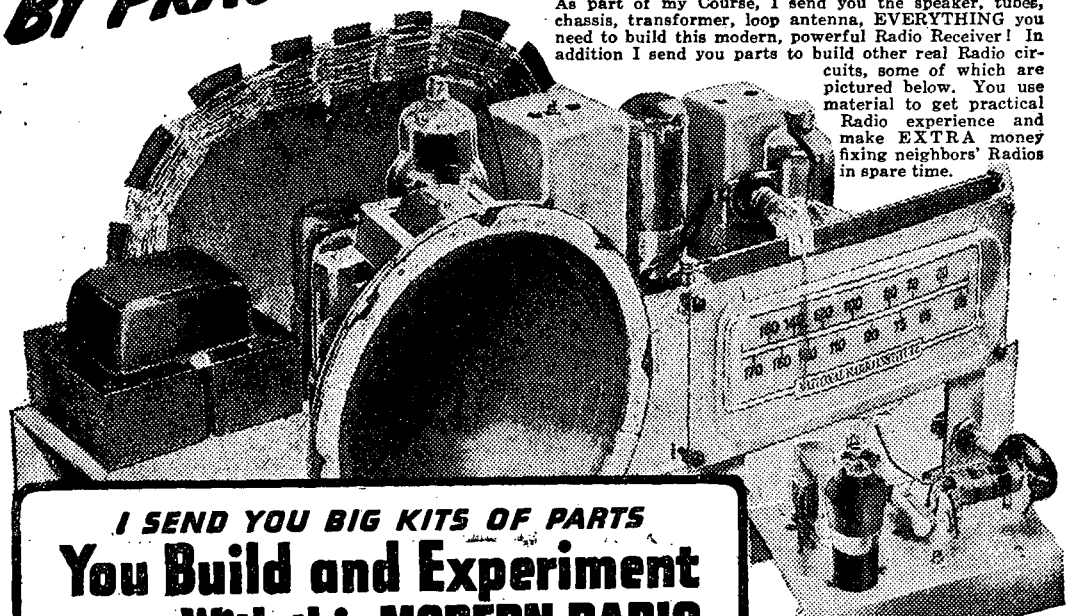

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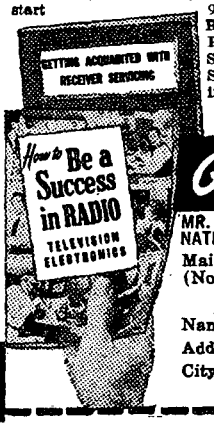

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VOLUME 11 NUMBER 3

All Stories Complete

THE MERMAID OF MARACOT DEEP (Novelette—18,000).....by Alexander Blade..... 8

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Miles beneath the surface of the ocean lay a strange land—ruled by giant mermaids! . . .

THE RETURN OF LAN-NING (Short—6,000).....by Guy Archette..... 40

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From out of space came a great ship, hovering over Saoh—bringing a long lost God home . . .

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The Gardook of Demos challenged any *being* to beat him at chess—so an Earthman responded . . .

Front cover painting by Arnold Kohn, illustrating a scene from "The Mermaid of Maracot Deep."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE'VE got a really top-notch lineup for your reading pleasure this month as you will have noted from one glance at the contents page. How could it be any other way with names like Alex Blade, Berk Livingston, Guy Archette, and Geoff St. Reynard, just to mention a few. So you can sit back and relax now and we'll give you a sneak preview of the swell yarns these boys have contributed for this issue.

FIRST off there's Alex Blade's new novelette, "The Mermaid of Maracot Deep." By now you know that Alex is one of the top science-fantasy writers in the country, so we think his new story will be right at the top of your list of favorites. What's it all about? Well, picture for yourself a submarine commander who gazes from his conning tower over a peaceful lagoon, and suddenly sees a giant figure rise out of the water—a beautiful mermaid! She waves at him in a friendly gesture and then in a quick movement picks one of the men from the submarine and—oops! That's where we're going to stop. Right where the story starts. For you see, this mermaid turned out to be anything but friendly, and we wouldn't want to spoil the story for you by telling you anything more. Incidentally, how do you like the swell cover Arnold Kohn painted around the story? We think it's a humdinger!

GUY ARCHETTE returns this month with a swell mood story that we think you'll like. "The Return of Lan-ning" is the story of a strange planet with people living on it who resemble earthmen, with but a single difference—they consider earthmen as Gods! Guy can always be depended upon to turn out an interesting tale, and we think you'll really like his latest offering.

THE novel for this month is by top favorite, Berkeley Livingston. Enough said, as you'll no doubt agree, but we're going to give you an interesting sidelight on how the story was written. Some time back artist Ronald Clyne submitted an illustration that we thought was pretty good. But there wasn't a story for it. Well, it lay in our files until we almost forgot about it. And then one day Berk dropped in and happened to see a proof of the illustration. "What story is this for?" he asked us. And we had to admit somewhat guiltily that we didn't have one. Berk said, "Good! I've already got the title—'City of Sand.' What do you think?" We thought it was a pretty good start and told Berk to tell us more. So he sat down and looked at the illustration for a few moments, and then started talking. What he told us you'll find out for yourself when you start reading on page 52. And we guarantee that Berk came through with a top-notch novel—the kind he's famous for! So we'll let you take over from here . . .

ROBERT W. KREPPS presents a unique little short this month, entitled "A Nickel Saved . . ." It's all about a man who was always saying, "Waste not, want not." And he really practiced what he preached. So much so that when a peculiar sort of accident happened to him, his wife carried out the axiom he had put so much faith in. You think this is a rather hazy hint as to what the story is about? Well, maybe you're right, but we can't be any more definite because that would spoil the entire story for you. So we'll let it go with that gentle teaser, and our own personal guarantee that you'll like the story.

IT'S a real pleasure to welcome back Geoff St. Reynard to the pages of FA. Geoff has been absent for a long time—too long a time we might say. Remember his "Mr. Beller and the Winged Horse"? You really praised that yarn, and rightly so. Now Reynard is back, with another of his humorous-type fantasies. "The Plaid Pterodactyl" concerns a peculiar little Scotchman who kept an even more peculiar pet. Yep, you've guessed it, a pterodactyl from the long forgotten past! Of course, his friends had never seen the *pet*, so when they invited the Scotchman for a visit, they were somewhat surprised by the strange sounds in his room . . . We'll let you continue now and find out just what happened. Geoff really caught the spirit of the story, and we predict you'll be clamoring for more!

FINISHING up the issue is your old favorite, H. B. Hickey. And he returns with a mighty fine story too. "Checkmate to Demos" starts out on an alien world, among a race of super-intellects. It concerns a being known as Entar, a champion kven player. (Kven would be known as chess on Earth.) Entar was confident that nobody in the Universe could beat him—so an earthman was chosen to test the mighty Entar. What happened you'll find out when you read the story. Which winds up shop for now. But we'll be seeing you next month.....WLH

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THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

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How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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The MERMAID

By Alexander Blade

Beneath the ocean floor lay a great secret—guarded by the giant mer-race . . .

JON BERING watched from his position atop the conning tower as the sleek submarine plowed its way through the placid Pacific waters toward the small atoll ahead. It was like any one of a thousand similar atolls that dotted the immense ocean expanse. And like many others, it had no name. It was not even registered on other than military maps, he knew.

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OF MARACOT DEEP

Bering's body writhed in pain as the fiery blast of the ray tube suddenly swept over him . . .

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Behind him he heard the sound of feet climbing up on the conning tower.

"We're approaching Rendezvous X, Commander."

Bering turned his lean muscular body and nodded at the ensign with clear grey eyes.

"Proceed according to plan," he said.

The ensign saluted and turned back to the ladder he had just climbed. Bering watched the man descend, then turned his gaze once more to the atoll ahead.

There was no necessity for him to remain below, he knew. The crew of the submarine was well trained, their course clear, and the instructions would be carried out.

They would enter the lagoon they were approaching. They would enter and wait for further orders from the home fleet. Orders from Bikini.

Bering's eyes grew thoughtful as he thought of the past day and night. He saw once again in his mind's eye the gigantic mushroom of water that had billowed skyward, the delayed but finally thundering roar of sound that had smashed across miles of water, the devastating sight that had been the underwater explosion of the Bikini atom bomb.

And a slight shudder took hold of him as he remembered. It had struck him at that tense moment, when his eyes had seen the ocean erupt, that man was playing with dangerous forces. Forces that once released, might turn on those who had unleashed them.

But it was not within his province to question the wisdom of decisions made in Washington. He could only carry out his part of the plan. The great experiment that he was now a part of. The experiment to test the destructiveness of an underwater atomic explosion. His part in that experiment was veiled in secret orders. He would receive further word at Rendezvous X.

The submarine plowed its way through the quiet waters of the lagoon, a placid expanse of blue-green circled by a coral reef. And then the humming throb of the submarine's motors quieted away, and the sleek craft rested on the calm surface.

Bering drank in the warm clean air and felt very content. His eyes continued to gaze out across the blue-green expanse as he heard feet clumping up the ladder behind him again.

Finally he turned and saw Ensign Bill Clark standing beside him.

"A pretty pleasant view, eh, Clark?"

The ensign nodded, his youthful features smiling. "Yes, sir. Would be kind of nice to take a swim."

Bering smiled back. "It would be, if we were here on a pleasure cruise. But we're not. We're . . ."

His voice broke off as he saw a startled look cross Clark's face. The ensign was staring off behind Bering, his eyes wide. As Bering watched him with a frown creasing his forehead, he saw Clark's jaw suddenly drop and his lips quiver.

"What's the matter, man?" Bering asked.

"Good Lord—sir—look!"

At the gasp in Clark's voice, Bering swung around and stared out across the blue-green waters.

Then, like Clark, his eyes stared in disbelief.

A HAND, a Herculean hand, with fingers that he judged to be at least fifty feet in length, was reaching out of the water not a quarter of a mile astern.

"S-sir—do you—see it? It—it's impossible!"

Clark's stuttering words echoed flatly on Bering's ears. He didn't have to turn his head to know that the ensign's eyes were riveted on the weird scene

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taking place on the water. He had eyes only for what he saw. For what he knew he was seeing, just as Clark was seeing it, for what he knew could not possibly be true.

The hand reached higher out of the clear waters now, and wavy ripples formed a wake at its movement.

And then suddenly the water far behind the hand suddenly lashed in a frothing frenzy. Bering caught a single glimpse of a scaly tail-like member as it broke the surface of the water in a crashing sound.

He heard Clark cry out behind him in sudden fear. Then he saw the water churn around the hand as the tail disappeared, and suddenly a head broke the surface of the lagoon.

Bering stared into an exquisite face. It was the face of a woman, a face so huge he couldn't estimate its size, a face smooth as alabaster, finely chiseled with perfect features.

He heard Clark gasp again behind him.

"It—it's a mermaid! Sir—a giant mermaid!"

At any other moment, and at any other time, Bering knew he might have found the situation and Clark's gasping voice, ludicrous. But not now. For what Clark had just said aloud, had been the impossible thought that had flashed through Bering's mind.

The beautiful woman's face, the high-piled black hair, the swelling bared bosom, the flashing scaled tail . . .

There was a sound again behind Bering. Clumping feet coming up the ladder to the conning tower.

"Sir, the engineer reports that—"

Bering heard one of the crew stop in mid-sentence. He heard the man give a strangled gasp of surprise as he moved beside the submarine commander.

Bering tore his gaze from the face of the mermaid and turned. He saw Clark, standing frozen, his eyes looking out over the lagoon in a dazed manner. And the sailor who had come to report to him was gripping the railing of the conning tower in a grip of disbelief.

Bering was about to order the man below when he heard a splashing movement in the water of the lagoon. He turned his eyes again and saw the face of the giant mermaid break into a smile, revealing a set of even, white teeth. Teeth that might well have been a gleaming picket fence in size.

And even as he saw the smile cross the mermaid's face, he saw one of the giant hands snake out through the water in a movement so fast he could hardly follow it.

The fingers were extended, straight toward the conning tower of the submarine. Extended and reaching.

"Lookout!" Bering cried a warning and flung himself down behind the protecting metal wall of the tower. Even as he dropped to the floor, however, he saw the giant fingers flick against the side of the tower.

The seaman tried to drop to the floor behind the metal wall. But he was too late.

A strangled cry of fear left his lips as the giant fingers closed around his body.

Bering heard Clark cry out: "She's got him—sir—"

Then Bering saw the body of the sailor vanish over his head. He leaped to his feet and stared with Clark.

THE sailor thrashed wildly in the grip of the giant mer-woman. His fingers fought desperately to loose the grip around his body. But he was as ineffectual as a fly in the hand of a man. And as he struggled, his voice echoed across the waters in cries of terror.

Now, as Bering watched, awe-struck, the hand had lifted the sailor to a height even with the smiling giant face. Then,

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the other hand of the creature lifted from the water in a leisure movement and plucked the clothing from the man's struggling figure in quick, powerful motions. It was as if the man's uniform had been made of paper. In seconds he lay naked in the hand of the mermaid, his shouts growing weaker, his struggles less violent.

Bering became aware of what was happening in a startled, horrified instant. He could see the fingers of that hand slowly constricting, tighter. And the voice of the sailor faded away into a strangled gasp of pained terror. Then finally, the hand became a tightly balled fist, and the body in its grip ceased its struggles to lie limp in that terrible grasp.

"Good Lord, sir—she's killed him!"

Clark's voice came in a hoarse gasp beside Bering. And even as the ensign's words faded away, Bering saw the mermaid's hand moved closed to her smiling mouth, and then, before his horrified eyes, she calmly bit the man's head off.

It was a quick movement. The flashing teeth were a smear of red. And then, in quick succession, an arm followed a leg.

Bering heard the ensign retch beside him and felt his own stomach knot up in horror. But he couldn't tear his eyes away from the grisly sight as the mer-woman calmly ate, piece by piece, the dismembered sections of what had been a moment before a live human being.

Time seemed to stand still for Bering in those long moments. He watched the jaws of the woman chew in leisure movements, saw the throat muscles constrict as she swallowed . . .

Then, with an effort, he tore his gaze away and stared at Clark.

The ensign was holding onto the railing with a sick effort. Bering reached out and gripped the man by the arm.

"Clark! Get below! We're going into action before it's too late!"

He half shoved the man to the ladder and followed him down into the submarine. He closed the opening over his head as he went and swung the wheel-lock. Then he was in the control room, ripping orders to startled members of the crew.

"Hard astern! Prepare to descend! Make ready torpedo tubes one and two!"

Order followed order, and the crew of the submarine flew into action at his commands. He could hear Clark shouting to some of the men what had happened, even as his orders were being carried out. He turned savagely to the ensign.

"Get a grip on yourself, man! Do you want to start a panic? Get to your station!"

He saw Clark bite his lips to stop the quivering, and then the face of the ensign sobered and he nodded.

"I'm sorry, sir. It's just . . ."

Bering nodded, gripping the periscope controls. "I know. But we can talk later. We're in danger now."

Then his eyes fastened on the periscope as he turned the controls to focus on the scene above.

HE BECAME aware of the throbbing of the submarine's motors, and the power humming through the sleek vessel gave him the feeling of confidence he needed. He rapped out swift orders to the gun crews. Heard his orders relayed. Then the surface came into view as the submarine started to move through the water, already tilting in a sharp descent.

He saw the mermaid, staring at the now moving submarine, and he saw her flick her hand daintily in the water to remove the last traces of her gory feast.

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Then her face spread into a laugh.

The submarine was moving swiftly away from her, Bering saw, on a tack that would put them close to the mouth of the lagoon. He rapped out swift orders and felt the craft turn in a frothing motion through the water.

In moments the forward torpedo tubes would be in line to fire.

Bering counted off those moments as he sounded sharp orders to the gun crew.

And then the moment had come. The target was in line, the swelling breast of the mer-woman in line with the forward tubes.

"Fire one!"

Bering snapped the order out.

He felt a whoosh of sound as the fire order was carried out. And he saw a streak of foam in the water as the discharged torpedo left the tube and sped toward its mark.

But it never reached it.

As if she had been forewarned, the mermaid suddenly shot through the water on a tangent away from the streaking line of the torpedo. It sped by the spot she had been and continued its foam-flecked way to the opposite side of the lagoon.

There was a thundering report as it exploded against the coral reef, and a spray of water and rock shot skyward.

Bering frantically swung the periscope to follow the mermaid's lightning-like movements. He felt the submarine swerve in its course under his orders, and he tried to bring the second tube in firing position.

Then suddenly the mermaid vanished from his sight. He stared into the periscope frantically, desperately, sweeping the surface of the lagoon.

And as he looked, a sick feeling spread through his body. A feeling of impending doom. A feeling of disaster that he knew was coming, that he knew he was now powerless to prevent.

And then it happened. Even as the thought crossed his mind. Even as he steeled himself for the unknown blow.

The submarine suddenly pitched in the water. Like a toy that has been pushed across the placid surface of a pond by a child's roughly guiding hand. Only it wasn't the hand of a child, Bering knew. It was the hand of a giant creature out of oceanic legends. And it now held the body of the submarine in its grasp.

Cries of startled fear filled the air of the control room around Bering. He felt his feet slip on the floor as the submarine turned on its side. He felt the tremor of the screws, fighting mightly, biting futilely into the water, held back by a strength far superior to the driving force of the sub's motors.

He heard prayers being breathed by tough sea-hardened men. And he felt a prayer in his own heart. A desperate prayer. A prayer he knew was useless even as he breathed it.

The submarine pitched again. And Bering knew it was being turned in the hands of the mermaid, turned for the inspection of a giant creature. Turned and examined.

He felt the metal sides of the ship creak in protest as the vessel was twisted through the water. And Bering's hands clung desperately to the controls of the periscope as he fought to maintain his footing.

THEN suddenly the ship righted. And though the throb of the motors continued, and the screws bit strainingly into the water, the ship remained motionless.

Bering fastened his eye to the periscope and saw the dim murky haze of the water. Finally a distorted shape came into view. The face of the mermaid, gazing at the periscope, laughing.

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And then Bering's body went numb with astonishment. He saw the lips of the mer-woman forming words, and he heard them. *They rang through his mind in strident tones!*

"Fool! Would you try to thwart the power of Leulle? Do you pit your puny might against *me*?"

A startled gasp broke from Jon Bering's lips.

"Who are you? *What* are you? I hear your voice in my mind—"

"As do all the members of your strange craft!" the words thundered in Bering's mind. "But it is to you, the commander of this vessel that I speak. It is to you I demand obedience to the will of Leulle."

Anger shot through Bering then. Deep, uncontrollable anger.

"Obedience? Obedience to a killer? You overestimate yourself—Leulle, or whatever you are called. I and every man under my command will die first!"

A loud laughter flooded Bering's mind, and his eyes saw the lips of the mermaid draw back in an expression of scorn through the periscope.

"You will die soon enough, rash one. Yours was the opportunity to gain the favor of the Gods by sacrifice. You have chosen to disregard the honor of Maracot Deep. For that you will all die—and slowly."

"Maracot Deep?" Bering breathed the word questioningly, fighting for time. There must be a way. One moment of respite. One moment in which to send the second torpedo winging on its errand of death and destruction.

But as if she had read the very thought that crossed his mind, the mer-woman laughed again.

"Think not of trying to harm me with your weapons. They are powerful, as I have witnessed, but I shall not again give you a chance to use them. You ask of Maracot Deep? . . . Possibly you shall see before you die. You are indeed strange and rash creatures. My people would be amused with you . . ."

"I don't understand," Bering said desperately. "My reason tells me you can't exist . . ."

Again the loud laughter. "Do you not believe your own senses? Do you not see me? Feel the power of my grip upon your strange craft? But of course. You on the surface could not be aware of us—even as we of Maracot Deep were unaware of you until you blew open the ocean floor."

Her words stunned Bering. "Blew open the ocean floor? . . ."

"Yes, rash one. Your people set off a mighty explosive charge beneath the surface of the sea. Are you not aware of it?"

And then it dawned on Bering. Bikini! The atomic bomb! But great heavens—could it indeed have done what this monstrous creature claimed? . . .

"—As I said, you blew open the floor of Maracot Deep. And after ages of being locked within the depths of the Earth, my people will now be free—free to forage upon the surfaces of the upper seas. And it is opportune. Our food has been growing perilous. The peoples of the bubble lands grow fewer."

Upper seas. Bubble lands. The phrases echoed through Bering's mind in dim question.

THE mermaid laughed again. "Yes, rash one, it is as you think. The interior of this planet is a maze of inner seas. And spread through them are the bubble lands, where others of your kind dwell, for the purposes of the mer-people."

Bering fought with the thoughts. "But what you say is ridiculous—the interior of the Earth is molten—"

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"You are wrong, rash one. It is as I have said. Your puny science knows little of the secrets of this planet. You have delved too deeply into the sciences of war to pay close attention to other things. All this I have found out since I was released from Maracot Deep. And when I return to make my report, my people will know how to deal with your war weapons. We will return to the surface prepared. No longer will we depend upon the bubble lands for our food."

The ghastly thought struck Bering. "You mean there are people—men and women beneath the ocean depths—people you feed upon . . ."

"As I fed upon your luckless fellow but a short while ago. But enough of this talk. It is time I made my report. And I have decided that you and your strange craft will attest to what I have found out. You will see Maracot Deep —before you die."

The ship gave a shuddering movement as the hand of the mermaid shifted it in her giant grip. Bering's thought protested wildly.

"But you can't take this craft down into the ocean depths! It wasn't made to withstand such pressures!"

"Fool!" the voice of Leulle thundered in his mind. "That is but one more thing your science knows little of. The force you call gravity reacts in the opposite once a certain depth is reached. But surely you and your brave men do not fear the thought of death?"

Bering set his lips grimly and remained silent.

Then, as his hands kept their grip upon the periscope controls, he saw the mermaid's head turn away from him and the ship gave another shuddering movement. His feet pitched forward and he half slipped to the floor as the ship dipped forward in an almost perpendicular dive.

He felt the thundering rush of water sweeping around the metal walls, felt the plates creak with groaning sounds as they shot into the depths of the sea beyond the outer end of the lagoon.

Bering tore his gaze away from the now useless periscope and stared in stunned silence at the men in the control room.

He saw Clark, holding desperately to a stanchion, staring at him with horror filled eyes. The ensign's lips trembled.

"Good Lord, sir . . . do you suppose we've lost our minds?"

Bering shook his head slowly. He could read the same expression in the faces of other men around him. And knew that the same thoughts must be going through those in other parts of the ship.

AND a sudden decision reached him. He flicked the inter-communicating switch, and his voice shot into the microphone connecting to all parts of the vessel.

"Attention all men. This is Commander Bering. There is no doubt in my mind but that all of you have just experienced the same thing I have. You have all heard the words of this creature known as Leulle. Now the first thing I want to impress upon you is the fact that you are members of the United States Navy. You have been trained to face death—and do it bravely. I want no panic on board my ship. The first man to start it will be shot." He paused, letting his words sink home. Then: "We on this ship have the entire fate of not only our country, but the whole world on our shoulders at this moment. A peril faces humanity that must be stopped. You have heard that there is an under water race existing. We have seen proof of this fact. One of our number has already given his life to this enemy. All of us may do so. But we

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will die fighting! And that's what we are going to do! Every man will stay at his station. You will await my orders! There may still be a chance—and we must be ready to take it when the moment arrives! That is all."

Bering flicked off the radio set and turned to look at the men in the control room. What he saw in their faces brought a grim smile to his lips. There was no panic in those faces now. There was still fear, a dread that was etched in their eyes, even as he knew it must be in his. But there was also hope there.

As he looked over to Clark, he saw that the ensign's lips no longer trembled. The man's face was set in grim lines.

"Thanks, sir. That was what we needed."

Bering nodded slowly at Clark's words, and a deep pride coursed through him. There was no need for further talk. The fighting spirit of the men had dispelled the terror of the unknown. The fear of forces beyond their immediate comprehension. Bering knew that when the moment for action came, the crew of the submarine would act in unison. And that if it meant death for their efforts, each man would meet it unflinchingly.

He was glad suddenly that it was his ship that had been destined for this perilous mission. For he knew that this was to be the supreme moment in his life. In the life of every man on board.

And in the meantime, he knew, they could only wait. Wait as the submarine, clenched in the grip of the monster woman of the ocean depths, plunged deeper with each passing second. Closer and closer to Maracot Deep. . . .

BERING lost track of time then. Each minute that passed seemed to be an interminable year, a time of dread, of waiting. The plates of the submarine kept up their protesting groan of sound, and the throb of the motors still hummed in his ears.

As he stood silently, feeling the rush of untold depths speed by from without, he thought ironically of a novel he had read in his youth. A novel by A. Conan Doyle. He dimly remembered reading of a party who had descended to the depths of the ocean, to a place called Maracot Deep. A land of fiction where strange beings existed on the ocean floor. And then he thought again of the mermaid's words. Of the land of Maracot Deep she had come from. Was there some mental link? Could it have been more than sheer coincidence that had led Doyle to write about that mythical land?

He shrugged the thought from his mind. There was little to be gained from idle speculation of that sort. The fact remained that his submarine, with his crew, was even now moving swiftly into the ocean depths. Held powerless in the grasp of a giant mer-woman. Being carried to—what? . . .

His thoughts broke off abruptly as the submarine suddenly righted. He could feel an air of tension in the control room as the small group of men grew taut.

Bering's hands closed around the periscope controls. His eye fastened to the glass.

At first he saw nothing. Nothing but deep, impenetrable blackness. But then, somewhere ahead, a glow suddenly became evident. A phosphorescent spreading of light that seemed to stream from a narrow chasm.

He felt the submarine being guided in the direction of that stream of glowing light.

It was brighter now. And as it grew closer with their swift approach through the ocean depths, he could see that the light streamed through what happened

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to be a jagged, gaping hole in the floor of the ocean.

He stared fascinated at that sight. Then it was true what the mermaid had said. An opening had been made in the floor of the sea, a disruption by the terrible explosive force of the under water atom bomb.

He watched as the submarine moved into that opening. Great jagged cliffs of rock jutted overhead as they entered, testifying to the terrific upheaval of nature that must have taken place.

And then the submarine had shot through the opening.

He could see Leulle now. Holding the submarine in one powerful hand, she was guiding it as she swam.

But his eyes rested on the head of the mer-woman only for a brief instant. Then his gaze swept through the glowing waters. He saw, in the distance, large, phantom shapes moving swiftly toward them. And as they approached, he saw other mer-people, men and women, gesturing in excitement toward Leulle and the strange machine she bore with her.

But then Bering saw something else. Something that set his pulse pounding in excitement.

ANOTHER chasm grew ahead of them as they moved through the waters of the inner sea. But this was unlike the opening in the floor of the ocean. It was a smooth-sided tunnel cut into the rock walls of a mountain that sprang from the inner depths. And the light that shone through it was clear, making the water crystalline in appearance. It was as if he was looking into the bottom of a huge bubble of water, to the clear surface above it.

And his excitement grew. For he remembered suddenly what the mer-woman had said about the bubble lands. Bubble lands in the inner seas where others of his kind dwelt!

His gaze switched suddenly from the tunnel and he stared at the glowing waters around the submarine.

The mer-people had reached them and were staring and gesturing at Leulle. The mermaid stopped swimming and Bering felt the screw of the submarine biting idly into the water as her grip loosened on the vessel.

He could see that a conversation was taking place with the weird telepathic powers of the mer-people. There was excitement on their gigantic faces as they stared from the mermaid to the submarine.

Bering tore his gaze from the periscope and shot a quick look at the men in the control room.

"Stations! Clark, relay my orders as I give them! We're in the land of the mer-people at this moment. We'll only have one chance and I want action when we get it. Every man at the ready!"

His words bit out in quick, clipped phrases, and he saw the tension ease in the faces of the men now that the time of waiting was over with. He saw Clark nod a salute and turn to the intercommunicating set. Then as Bering switched his gaze back to the periscope, he heard Clark rapping out quick orders to the rest of the crew.

But Bering's full attention was now directed on the scene outside the submarine. The mermaid had released the submarine from her grip and moved away from it. The ship floated in the waters, its idly turning screw moving it slowly.

And then Bering saw one of the other mer-people moving toward the submarine. It was the moment he had been waiting for. The one distraction that might be turned to their advantage. He knew if the merman reached the submarine he would be too late.

"Hard astern! Number two tube

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ready to fire!"

His orders rapped out and he heard them relayed. He felt the submarine turn slowly in the water as the merman approached, one giant hand already reaching out. In seconds it would be too late. "Fire two!"

Almost as the words left his lips the order was carried out. He felt the *thwoosh* as the torpedo shot from the submarine. His fingers gripped the periscope controls in an agony of desperate suspense as he watched.

The merman stopped his forward motion in the water as the torpedo shot toward him. He tried frantically to swim sideways, out of the path of the hurtling projectile of death. But he was too late.

The torpedo struck him in the chest and exploded.

THERE was a terrific blast of sound that vibrated through the thick metal walls of the submarine. The water churned and frothed with the concussion, and Bering could see dismembered parts of the dead merman hurtling a red gory trail through the surrounding waters.

And he saw the other mer-people moving swiftly away from the scene, panic in their ranks.

It was the moment he had hoped for. The confusion he needed.

"Full throttle! Hard to starboard!"

He heard Clark relaying his orders and felt the submarine jump ahead in the waters, veering to the right.

He saw the tunnel of light approaching now, straight ahead, and he swung the periscope to see what was happening behind them.

He saw the giant mermaid, Leulle, streaking after them, a terrible grimace of anger on her features. Her long arms were reaching out to grasp the tail of the submarine, and Bering could see that once those mighty fingers closed over the vessel they would tear it to pieces.

A cold sweat broke out on his brow as he watched her streak closer. And the speed of the fast moving submarine seemed as nothing now. A deep fear took hold of Bering in that moment. For he knew that in seconds she would reach the submarine and—

The tunnel walls shot by the sides of the submarine in a blurring motion of speed. And Bering swung the periscope to see that they were moving swiftly into the bubble connected by the tunnel to the inner sea.

He saw the fingers of the mermaid clutch desperately for the tail of the ship, and miss. He saw her try to wedge her gigantic figure through the narrow tunnel opening and fail.

And then the submarine was out of the tunnel and plowing through clear, glowing waters. And Bering breathed a prayer of relief.

In the minutes that followed, Bering rapped out swift orders to his jubilant crew. The submarine nosed upward and broke the surface of the water and Bering scanned the calm surface with his periscope.

Off in the distance he made out the irregular contours of a large section of land. He could see towering hills sloping down to meet the water, but as yet the distance was too great to make out definite shapes with the naked eye.

He turned from the periscope and flicked on the inter-radio set.

"Attention, all crew members. Ensign Clark has already told you we have escaped from the mer-people. For the moment we are safe. But let me remind you that we are deep within the Earth, in a bubble land of the inner seas. Just how we are going to return to the surface of the Pacific is something I cannot at this moment tell you.

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Our fuel reserves will not last indefinitely. Our one chance is to contact the others of our kind who the mer-people hinted existed in these bubble lands. We are even now approaching a large island. Every man will stay at his station and await further orders."

Bering flicked off the set and turned to Clark.

"Let's go topside, Mister."

Clark nodded and led the way to the conning tower ladder. Bering followed him up and presently a cool, fresh breeze struck his face as he climbed to the railing of the conning tower and stood beside Clark.

They gazed out over the placid waters and stared at the now rapidly approaching land. Bering could see now that the hills sloped down to a fairly level stretch of land near the shore. Stretches of dense forest and open plains met his gaze as he scanned the horizon.

Beside him, Clark suddenly tensed.

"Look sir, over there!"

BERING followed the ensign's gaze and a speculative frown crossed his forehead. He was staring at what seemed to be the walls of a city. It had been almost hidden in the phosphorescent light that poured over this strange land. But it was now revealed through the shimmering light, a tall, walled area that came almost down to the water's edge.

And then Bering saw something else. He was staring at a motley group of assembled vessels at the water's edge, in what seemed to be a dock area. But they were ships unlike any he had ever seen. They roughly resembled ancient viking vessels, but instead of sails, tall masts stood upright from their decks, and at the tops of the masts, were gleaming metal blades.

Clark voiced his thoughts at that moment.

"Those ships, sir, at the docks of the city—they seem to have propellers instead of sails!"

Bering nodded slowly. And then his eyes saw something else, as the submarine moved closer. Every so often one of the ships seemed to rise from the surface of the water where it was moored. They would seemingly float for a moment in the air and then rest again on the surface of the water. The thought struck his mind of what the mermaid had said as Clark asked the question.

"What do you suppose causes them to float like that, sir?"

Bering replied thoughtfully. "It must have something to do with the reverse effect of gravity that the mermaid mentioned, Clark. We've got to expect almost anything in this impossible world."

They were very close to the shoreline now, and Bering could make out tall, bulky constructed buildings behind the stone walls of the city. In what appeared to be the center of the city he made out an especially large building, cut from multi-colored rock, a structure of a strange beauty he had never dreamed possible. In the iridescent light that flooded the surrounding land, it seemed almost like a palace out of some magical myth.

And then his gaze was swept away from the city as Clark pointed to the dock area which was crossing their path to the left as the submarine headed for a long sandy expanse of beach.

"Looks like we've been sighted, sir."

Bering saw the gates of the city open and a troop of men running down toward the shoreline they were rapidly approaching.

"This is about as far as we'll go, Clark," Bering ordered suddenly. "Stop the engines. We'll send a party ashore in one of the boats. If we go any further we'll be beached."

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Clark nodded and turned to hurry down the ladder to the control room of the submarine. But as his feet touched the first rung of the ladder, Bering's voice swore in surprise.

The submarine suddenly swayed in the water and, magically, lifted from the surface of the sea. Its huge bulk floated in the air over the surface of the water, and Bering suddenly felt as if he were weightless.

THE truth struck him in a flash. They had been caught in one of the weird gravitational effects of the bubble land, the same thing he had seen happen moments before to the ships anchored at the city's edge.

Even as he thought of it he knew it was too late to prevent the submarine from being grounded. Its forward momentum had carried it through the air, over the water, and finally, when the gravitational warp subsided, the ship dropped into the water with a jarring splash that sent a wave of water dashing across the conning tower.

Bering gripped the railing to retain his balance, and as he wiped the sea water from his eyes, he felt a grating sound from the keel of the submarine. The sound brought a momentary anger to him as he realized that the ship had been grounded.

There was a final movement as the screws of the ship tried to carry the vessel forward, then the nose of the submarine lifted into the air and the ship ground to a grating halt, its keel resting on the shallow bottom of the shore.

Bering watched as Clark scrambled to his feet and moved alongside him at the railing of the conning tower. The ensign's face held a troubled look.

"It'll be a difficult job getting her afloat again, sir . . ."

Bering nodded and turned his head to scan the shoreline. They had grounded a short distance away from the walled city, close to the dock area where the strangely propellered craft were anchored. And as he looked, the people who had run from the open gates of the city were now converging upon the beach in front of the grounded submarine.

As Bering looked closely at them he noted that they seemed to be all armed. But not with any type of weapon he had ever seen before. They held slim, silvery metal tubes in their hands. They were clad in gleaming, rust-colored tunics that had a metallic sheen to them. Close-fitting helmets of the same metallic substance fit their heads, and even from a distance he could make out a design on the helmets. The design of a mermaid, wrought in gold.

"They seem to be soldiers," Clark voiced Bering's thoughts.

The sub-commander nodded in reply, his eyes still on the mermaid design on the men's helmets.

Then finally he looked at their faces as they came slowly to the water's edge. Their skin was white, with a subtle yellowed cast to it, and their faces were curious, their eyes fastened on his and Clark's with a questioning gaze.

"The mermaid was right, sir," Clark said suddenly. "They are our kind. It's almost too weird to believe—a civilization miles beneath the surface of the Earth!"

"I think the next move is up to us," Bering replied as he watched the faces of the men on the beach. "Order the crew up. We'll go ashore."

Clark nodded a salute and turned to the control room ladder. Bering watched him disappear into the interior of the submarine, and then he slowly climbed down the conning tower and made his way to the landing ladder. His feet touched the water and he lowered himself slowly, removing his service au-

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tomatic and holding it over his head. The water was only waist deep at the prow of the ship where he entered the water. Swiftly he made his way shoreward, and as he approached, the line of soldiers stepped back to form a pocket into which he would walk.

A frown crossed Bering's face at the moment. It was almost as if it had been preordained. But it was too late for him to retrace his steps now.

HE STEPPED slowly onto the beach and stood for a moment, staring at the group of soldiers. Then one of them stepped forward and uttered a string of unintelligible words in a sharp manner. The soldier pointed at the weapon in Bering's hand, and Bering received the idea that he was supposed to drop it.

A warning sped through his mind at the conveyed command. He realized suddenly that these men were not meeting him with any friendly purpose. It was all too apparent that he was meant to be their captive. Their sullen eyes told him what their words failed to do.

He spun in his tracks suddenly and stared at the submarine. He saw Clark and the other members of the crew already pouring down from the conning tower and onto the deck of the ship. They were running toward the forward landing ladder to follow him ashore.

He shouted at them.

"Clark! Stay on board! Cover me with the deck guns—we're walking into a trap!"

Even as the words sped from his lips the soldier behind him let out a harsh command. Bering spun and levelled his automatic, but he was too late.

The foremost soldier raised the queer-looking metal tube in his hand and pointed it at Bering. There was a strange crackling hum in the air and a brilliant pencil of orange light sped from the tube.

It caught Bering in the chest and he felt a shocking numbness creep through his upper body. His arm dropped paralyzed to his side and his gun fell from nerveless fingers to the sandy beach. Then, out of the corner of his eye he saw the men on the submarine dashing to the gun positions.

But like he, they were also too late. Hardly had Clark cleared one of the guns for action when the leader of the troop beside Bering uttered another harsh command. Bering saw the soldiers level their strange tubes at the submarine and he saw a myriad leaping flashes of orange pencil-light bathe the deck of the ship in a stabbing glow. He saw the sailors stop in their tracks, and fall numbed to the deck of the submarine. He saw Clark frantically try and swing the muzzle of a machine gun to bear on the beach as one of the orange rays enveloped him. The ensign staggered, a shocked look on his face, and then he collapsed to the deck.

IT HAD only taken a matter of seconds, and then the entire crew of the submarine was motionless on the deck. And as the orange beams flicked off, Bering heard a chorus of laughter from the surrounding soldiers. The leader of the band stepped forward then and picked up Bering's fallen gun. Then he stepped back away from Bering and lifted his tube-weapon. Bering fought to move, but couldn't. He waited for the orange ray to stab at him, to probably end his life.

But instead he saw a sardonic smile play across the lips of the leader, and as he pressed the end of his ray tube, a soft green light welled forth from it and bathed Bering's body in an emerald glow.

At once the numbed feeling left Bering's body and he was free of the paralysis that had gripped him.

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He stared angrily at the leader of the soldier troop and watched as the man turned and gave rapid instructions.

Most of the soldiers immediately holstered their ray tubes at their belts and started forward into the water toward the submarine. It became plain to Bering that they were going to bring the crew ashore and into captivity, just as he now found himself.

The leader turned to him and uttered a string of words. Bering frowned as he caught one of them. It was the name of the mermaid, Leulle, and as the man uttered the name, he touched the emblem on his helmet in a gesture of respect. It dawned on Bering then that somehow there was a connection between these people and the mer-woman of the ocean depths. But his speculation was lost as the man motioned to two of the soldiers and they stepped forward to take Bering's arms tightly.

Then he was in the center of a cordon of the soldiers, and being marched toward the gates of the city. He cast a last look behind him to see others of the troop already converging on the deck of the submarine and bending over the prostrate bodies of the fallen crew.

Then it was all he could see. He was whisked through the gate of the city, and down a long street of cut stone slabs, lined with men and women clad in the peculiar metallic garments, gazing at him in curiosity as the soldiers made their way forward.

Shouts met his ears as he walked on, and though he could not understand what was being said, he received an impression of the words that were being conveyed. The people were laughing in a taunting fashion. Much as the civilians of a conquering army would have taunted at a parade of captured enemy troops. Bering found it difficult to understand. These people had never seen him before, and certainly they had never seen their ship. And yet they had been captured and he was now being led through the streets of the city in a triumphant march toward the huge, multi-colored palace ahead.

Bering fastened his gaze on the huge structure as they approached it. It was even larger than he had previously estimated. And its beauty was even more enhanced as he approached it.

Behind them the crowd followed in the wake of the soldier guard, and then the gates of the palace swung open and Bering walked through them.

THE metal cell door clanged shut behind him, and Bering tried to accustom his eyes to the semi-darkness.

It was cool and damp in the cell, and he knew it was beneath the level of the ground. They had walked down a steady decline until they came to the corridor of cells, and finally one of them had been opened and he had been shoved inside.

Now he stood, silently listening, the footsteps of the guards fading in the distance down the stone corridor. He could hear them laughing softly to themselves as they went, and Bering felt a bitter frustration well up inside him.

Then suddenly he heard a sound behind him.

It was a soft scuffling noise, in the deeper shadows of the rear of the cell. He tensed in alarm, and then a soft voice uttered words in the semi-darkness.

It was the voice of a girl, and a startled pulse beat within Bering. He edged forward in the shadows, across the stone floor, and then suddenly he saw her.

She lay on the floor of the cell, in the far corner, huddled, her feet trussed, and her arms bound behind her. She was clad in a close-fitting metallic garment of what seemed to be a green color.

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Her bosom rose and fell in even movements, and then Bering saw her move her head and again came the strange words in the darkness.

He moved over beside her and knelt on the cold stone floor. He could see her features now, soft, finely molded, with a cameo beauty that caught his breath. And her hair fell around her shoulders in a golden wave that shimmered even in the semi-light.

He shook his head slowly. "I'm afraid I don't understand what you're saying," he said softly. Then his fingers went to work on the tightly knotted bonds.

It wasn't rope, nor was it metal that held the girl. Bering's fingers fought with the tough slender bonds that somehow seemed to be a plastic substance. Finally they loosened and her legs were freed. His fingers touched the soft warmness of her flesh and it sent a strange feeling coursing through him. He fought it aside and went to work on the bonds pinioning her arms. Finally they were loosened and she sat up on the floor, rubbing her wrists where the bonds had cut in.

Bering leaned back and watched her curiously. Then she turned her eyes on his and he saw a look of warm gratitude in them and a smile.

"Thank you . . . who are you in this strange dress? And why has Ikar Staab taken you prisoner too?"

Bering straightened to his feet in amazed shock. He had not heard the words. It was a thought that had crept into his mind—the same way he had first communicated with the mer-woman!

The girl laughed softly, and the sound was warm and tinkling on his ears. Then her laughter faded away and the thought came across to him again.

"Do not be afraid of me, oh stranger. I know you do not speak our tongue, so I must communicate with you first in the ancient science. It will not take long for you to learn our language. I will teach you. Will you trust me?"

BERING stared at her in a weird fascination. Her lips had not moved and yet he had heard her words. But he knew he had nothing to fear from her. She was a prisoner just as he was. And she had mentioned the name of someone known as Ikar Staab. What had she meant? Who was Ikar Staab? And most of all, he wanted to know at that moment, who was this girl who could communicate telepathically just as the mer-woman had been able to do.

He nodded slowly at her and she smiled at him again.

"Very well. Just relax your mind. Do not think of anything. And do not be afraid that I will read what is in your mind. That I cannot do. But I can teach you—if you will let me. . . ."

The thought voice trailed off and Bering looked into the girl's eyes. Slowly he nodded assent, and then relaxed as she had told him to do.

It was a strange feeling that swept through him at that moment. It was a delicate sensation of softly spoken words, of a liquid voice murmuring through the dim recesses of his mind. He was aware of a delicate, subtle aroma that was not a smell to be recognized with his nostrils. It was a perfumed aura that swept through him, and he was aware that it was the aura of the girl herself. Delicate, subtle, utterly desirable. . . .

And then, as the sensation had begun, it stopped. The pleasant soothing mental contact between him and the girl was broken. And as it ended he felt somehow dejected. For that close union of her mind with his, for as brief an interval as it had been, had awakened something inside him that he had never

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known existed. It was almost as if she were a part of him for that brief instant, and Bering found himself wishing that what had been started would continue somehow forever.

"You can understand me now, oh stranger?"

The girl spoke and Bering found that he was now hearing her words, hearing the soft voice that left her lips. And it was a sound that had a musical quality to it.

"Yes, I can understand you," the words left Bering's mouth in a strange tongue that somehow seemed utterly familiar to him now. "But who are you?"

The girl stretched her slim legs on the floor of the cell and stared at him.

"I am Noreen, Princess of Konon. But who are you, oh stranger?"

Bering moved closer beside the girl and spoke softly.

"I am Jon Bering, Commander, United States Navy. My men and I were taken captive from our ship as we landed on the beach outside the walls of the city."

The girl frowned at him. "Commander? United States Navy? But I have never heard of the United States. . . . Is there a bubble in the inner sea that we have not been aware of?"

Bering's face sobered at her question, for it brought him back to the grim reality of the present. He sat forward on the floor beside her then, and in swift words, explained what had happened from the first moment his ship had entered the lagoon on the surface of the Pacific.

As he talked he watched the girl's eyes go wide in astonishment. And as he finished, he saw her awe replaced by a look of veiled dread.

"I guess that about covers my story up to the present moment," he told her. "Now maybe you can help me understand where I am and why I've been taken prisoner like this. You mentioned someone called Ikar Staab. . . ."

The girl nodded slowly, her voice no longer light, but filled with a disspirited note as she talked.

"It all becomes clear to me, now—Jon," she said hesitantly. "Ikar Staab must have been contacted by the mer-people. They must have told him of your coming to Takal. And Ikar Staab had his soldiers waiting to capture you."

"But who is this Ikar Staab? And why should he take orders from the mer-people?" Bering asked.

THE girl smiled wearily. "I will try and tell you, Jon. You see, our world, here beneath the surface of the Earth, is much different than yours. The inner seas, where the mer-people dwell and rule, are known as Maracot Deep. But in these seas there are air bubbles with tunnels connecting to the outer waters, and in these air bubbles live people such as we. The mer-people cannot enter our bubble lands because the tunnels are too narrow. But they cannot find enough food to eat in the open waters, so they prey upon us. . . ."

Bering frowned. "But if they cannot enter the bubble lands, then why should you fear them?"

"Because Ikar Staab of Takal, as all the rulers of Takal before him, has made a pact with the mer-people. In exchange for victims the mer-people give the ruler of Takal such secrets of science that enable him to forage among my people at will. You have seen one of these secrets, the numbing ray."

A horrified look crossed Bering's face. "You mean that Staab captures groups of your people and—feeds them to the mer-people?"

The girl nodded sadly. "That is true. And the time has come again for the offering to the mer-people. . . ."

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The girl's voice trailed off suggestively and Bering knew what she had failed to say.

"Then you have just been captured yourself, Noreen?"

The girl looked away from him, her eyes misty.

"Yes. I was riding in the hills of Konon. I heard sounds of battle in the distance, and when I rode up to see what was happening, I was captured. My father and a group of the soldiers of Konon had been attacked by Ikar Staab's men. Fortunately my father escaped, but I was taken along with many of our soldiers. We were taken through the long tunnel connecting Konon with Takal. I was thrown into this cell to await the time of offering. I am afraid it will be soon. And you too, Jon. . . . I am sorry. . . ."

The girl's voice ended on a low, hopeless note, and a grimness formed around Bering's mouth. He reached out and took the girl's hand gently in his. Her eyes raised at his touch.

"Listen to me, Noreen," Bering said. "There are many things I do not know about this strange world of yours, but one thing I do know. The mer-people are not invincible. I escaped from them. And what I did once I can do again. And I promise you, that when the time comes, you will go with me."

A SAD smile entered her eyes as she looked at him, and gently she returned the pressure of his hand. But then she shook her head.

"There is no escape for us, Jon. Ikar Staab is powerful. Only the great vibrator is the enemy of him and the soldiers of Takal."

"The great vibrator?" Bering frowned.

"Yes, Jon. The mer-people have sensitized the hearing of the people of Takal. Should they ever decide not to obey the mer-people, the great vibrator would send a loud sound crashing into their ears, numbing and killing them with the sound. . . ."

A feverish hope entered Bering's eyes. "This great vibrator—where is it?"

The girl shrugged. "Only the mer-people know that. Not even Ikar Staab knows. That is why he dares not refuse the will of the mer-people. He would die with the thundering sound in his ears . . ."

Bering's hopes sank away. Then there was no chance. The one thing that might possibly help them was a weapon held by the mer-people. The mer-people, who even now were waiting for their feast of victims from Konon—and the thought struck him bitterly—from the crew of his ship.

The girl pulled her hand gently from his and when he looked at her again he saw a determination in her eyes. "But I will die proudly, I will not let them think I am afraid. . . ."

An agony was working in Bering's throat as he looked at her. But then suddenly he stiffened. There was a sound from outside the cell door. He looked at the girl and saw a startled look on her face.

The sound grew louder, the approach of marching feet. Then Bering heard a sharp command to halt outside the cell door. He heard a key turn in a lock and then the cell door swung open.

Light from the corridor outside flooded the cell, and Bering found himself staring at the leader of the guard. The man had Bering's gun stuck in the belt at his waist, and he was holding one of the numbing ray tubes in his hand. There was a tight smile around his narrow lips.

"So the stranger from the outside world released the fair princess! Well that is good. Now she can walk to the presence of Ikar Staab—and the feast

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that awaits her!"

Bering got to his feet slowly as the girl rose beside him. She faced the guard with a scornful look.

"It is easy to talk bravely, Voda, with a numbing ray in your hand. You would not be quite so brave if my father and his soldiers faced you."

The guard called Voda laughed and motioned her toward the door. Then he turned to Bering and motioned him with his hand. It became evident to Bering that the man still thought he could not understand their language.

He moved forward without replying as Voda stepped back from the entrance of the cell.

Then Bering followed Noreen into the corridor.

They were quickly flanked on both sides by armed guards, and Voda strode to the head of the detachment.

With the girl walking beside him, Bering gripped her hand tightly in his.

IT WAS a huge chamber that met Bering's eyes as they entered through a wide arched doorway. The walls rose two stories in height on all sides, and sloped to a domed ceiling overhead. There were glass-like sections in the roof through which light streamed from the outside, bathing the chamber in a white glow. At the far end of the chamber there was a raised dais with a throne standing on it. A man sat on the throne watching them approach.

But it was not the throne or the man on it that took Bering's gaze at that moment. He was staring at the center of the chamber, where the floor opened into a huge circular hole. The hole was filled with water, its placid surface a few inches beneath the edge of the stone floor. The light from the domed ceiling made the water look a bright green. And around the hole, on the far side, stood a group of men, their arms bound behind their backs, their tunics a brilliant green.

Instinctively, Bering knew that these were the men of Konon, the victims to be thrown to the mad feast of the mer-people. And his thought was proven correct as the girl's fingers suddenly trembled in his as her eyes too fastened on the small group of men.

Behind the men, ray tubes held at the ready, stood a group of Takal soldiers at rigid attention.

Then the scene was taken from Bering's eyes as he and the girl were led toward the dais.

They halted a few feet away from the raised platform and now Bering took a good look at the man sitting on the throne.

He was tall, his rust-colored tunic edged with gold, setting him apart from the others. On his head was a helmet like the soldiers of his guard wore, but the mermaid emblem was a crest of gold, glittering in the light from the dome.

His features were long and hawk-like, his eyes wide-set and narrow. Bering noted that his lids were half-closed, giving the impression of narrowness, and also hiding the expression that otherwise would have been revealed in them. This then would be Ikar Staab, leader of the Takal, pawn of the mer-people.

As if the man had read Bering's thoughts, Staab suddenly smiled sardonically at Bering.

"So this is the Commander of the strange submarine craft. Leulle has told me of you at length, Jon Bering."

Bering's face remained impassive but felt the girl release his fingers from hers as they stood now before the throne of Ikar Staab.

"And you then are Ikar Staab, who does the bidding of the mer-people like a weak, frightened man."

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The words left Bering's lips in direct reply to the mockery in Staab's own voice. The ruler of Takal's eyes drew together in an even narrower expression at Bering's words.

"So. You are already acquainted with the intricacies of our tongue," he said coolly. Then his gaze flicked to the girl. "I see the Princess Noreen has lost no time since your imprisonment."

HE PAUSED to let his words have the desired effect, then turned back to Bering.

"And I also see that you have not as yet learned who is master here. Your tongue speaks too loosely in your head. Voda!"

The last word was a harsh command and behind Bering, the Takal guard commander stepped up to Bering.

Bering turned abruptly to face the grinning face of the guard chief.

"Yes, Excellency, I shall be honored to teach him his place!"

Bering heard Voda's mocking words and watched the man lift his ray tube. Beside Bering, he heard the girl stifle a sob, and Bering tensed himself for the numbing paralysis ray.

But when Voda pressed the end of the ray tube it was not the orange ray that lanced out at him. It was instead a thin pencil of purple light that struck at his middle.

Bering stifled a groan that rose to his lips as a hot flash of intense pain seared through his body. He stood erect, swaying rigidly on his feet as the guard commander played the ray up and down his body, and the pain grew to an intensity that brought a strangled cry to Bering's lips, but died there as his throat constricted into a burning, searing agony.

When he thought he could stand it no longer, and as his senses reeled under the impact of the burning ray, the guard commander suddenly switched off the ray tube at a curt command from Ikar Staab.

Bering gasped for breath and felt the air rush into his pain tortured lungs. His body was still a fiery agony that made every nerve, every fibre of his being shriek for respite.

He heard a shout of laughter go up from the soldiers of Staab's guard, and then finally the pain ebbed to a dull throbbing that left him weak.

"So. Now perhaps you have more insults to cast at the ruler of Takal?"

Staab's mocking voice came sharply to Bering's ears. He focused his smarting eyes on the angry face of Ikar Staab. His voice came hoarsely, breathlessly.

"You may be able to stop my tongue with your rays, Staab, but you cannot kill the contempt I think of."

Staab laughed shortly. "I think perhaps that too can be arranged, and will be shortly. For does not death halt all thought? Contemptuous or otherwise?"

The chilling words struck Bering and brought him back to the immediacy of their peril.

"So that is why you brought us here? To tell us we are to be killed?"

Staab's eyes turned briefly to the girl. "I assume the Princess Noreen has already told you of the fate awaiting her? Ah, yes, I see she has. I marvel at the Princess' calm in the face of her approaching death. Or is it that she has resigned herself to the high honor the mer-people have bestowed upon her?"

Noreen drew herself up stiffly and there was a proud cast to her face as she spoke to the ruler of Takal for the first time.

"If my death will hasten the day of your downfall, and the destruction of the infamous mer-people, then indeed I am honored!" the words left her lips in a haughty tone.

Staab's face darkened a trifle under the lash of her words. Then he gave

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another short laugh and turned back to Bering.

"Perhaps the Commander Bering would like to know how futile the words of the Princess Noreen really are? Perhaps he would like to know before he too joins the feast of Leulle what is going to occur within a very short time to his own people on the surface of the great oceans?"

THERE was a haunting mockery in Staab's voice as he looked at Bering, and Bering felt a chill sweep through him at the man's words. It was all too apparent that Staab was playing a game with them. A game of taunting, a duel to break down their forced calm, their utter contempt of him and his threats.

And Bering saw that Staab had read the thought in his eyes. For the ruler of Takal suddenly signalled with his hand to one of the guards standing behind the throne. The guard saluted smartly and disappeared behind the throne.

In moments he was back with two other guards. And they were wheeling in a large screen-like machine. They pushed it in front of the throne and to one side. Then they stepped back to their place behind the throne.

Staab pointed to the machine.

"Here you will see the answer to your foolish insinuation of weakness. Here you will see how frightened is the ruler of Takal. Here you will see the great wisdom of the mer-people as a token of their appreciation for my services."

He moved a jeweled finger to the arm of the throne and Bering saw there a set of buttons. The finger of Staab slowly pressed one of the buttons.

Almost at once there was a hum of power from the machine beside the throne. And then as Bering watched, the large screen on the machine suddenly glowed. Iridescent lights played across its surface for a moment, and then finally a scene began to materialize on the smooth surface.

It was much like television, Bering thought, as he watched the scene leap into shape, but it was far superior he also knew. For what he saw was a three dimensional projection of the beach outside the city. He could see the docks and the strange propellered craft tied to them, and he could see his own submarine still aground. But then his eyes widened in complete astonishment.

For he was staring at a huge construction project close beside the grounded submarine.

For a moment he thought he might be staring at a huge drydock at some west coast seaport where a mighty battleship was being constructed.

Hundreds of workers from the city were engaged in the manipulation of strange machines, from which shot various rays of many colors. And as the rays worked ceaselessly, large sections of well molded metal appeared, to be lifted by other rays, into place on the giant construction project.

And then Bering knew what it was they were building. It was a submarine. But not a submarine such as he had ever known. It was an exact duplicate of his own ship, but a duplicate on such a scale as to stagger the imagination. It towered in the air nearly two hundred feet, a gargantuan framework of metal hull and keel. One side of the huge ship was already completed, and Bering saw that at the rate of work the rays were capable of, it would be only a short time before the other side was finished.

AND then he saw something that brought a startled look to his eyes. For he saw Ensign Clark, and members

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of the submarine crew standing beside the tiered ray machines, giving instructions to the workmen at the controls of the huge rays.

"An interesting sight, don't you think, Bering? As you will note, your men are aiding in the construction of the giant ship. Of course, they had to be persuaded. But you have already seen how effective our rays can be when properly used."

Bering tore his gaze from the screen and looked at the smiling face of Ikar Staab.

"Just why are you using my men to construct a ship of such gigantic size?" he asked. And even as the question left his lips he knew that Staab had been waiting for him to ask it. He had played right into the man's designs.

"A very intelligent question, Commander Bering. A question that it will give me a great deal of pleasure in answering. What you are looking at is as you have noted, an exact duplicatio of your own submarine craft. But a duplication on a very much larger scale. It will be exact down to the last switch.

"Even to the store of torpedoes and fuel. And your men will be in the forward chambers to run the craft when it leaves here very shortly, loaded with a thousand fighting men of Takal for your surface world. Do you begin to understand?"

Bering understood only too well. He remembered now what the mermaid, Leulle had said mockingly. That her people would know how to deal with the weapons of the surface. That they would return in force to conquer, to forage . . .

"I see that you begin to understand, Commander Bering. But first of all let me quell any thoughts you may have of your own people being able to save themselves. When we leave here, we will have the mer-people with us. In that great ship I will ride from the bubble land of Takal, through the inner sea, through the break in the ocean floor, and up to the surface of your world. And once there, with the mer-people to aid us, we will conquer each of your lands, one by one. And as we conquer, the mer-people will have fresh food, food that grows perilously short here in Maracot Deep.

"And all this will take place within a few short hours. Under the guiding rays the construction project will be completed. Then we will insert your own submarine in one of the forward torpedo tubes. Once we are on the surface, that submarine will be released when we sight one of your large fleets. It will act as a decoy to lead your fleets into a trap we shall prepare. It is all very simple, very exacting, and you may die with the pleasant thought on your mind."

The voice of Ikar Staab stopped then and Bering felt the cold chill of his words echoing in his mind. For the first time since he stood before the throne of the ruler of Takal, Bering felt a cold dread, and his calm was gone, the horror of what Staab had said showing in his eyes.

STAAB saw that look spread over Bering's face and laughed. Then as Bering took another long look at the screen, and saw that already the Herculean submarine was nearing completion, Staab suddenly depressed a button on the arm of his throne and the screen went blank. The same guards immediately stepped forward and pushed the machine away behind the throne.

Then Staab turned his eyes on the girl who had stood motionless throughout the long minutes.

"And now a word for the Princess Noreen. Perhaps you are thinking that

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when we leave here your people in Konon will be free. And that they will be able to come through the tunnels to Takal and conquer while we are away.

"Well let me give you this one reassuring thought before you die. Even now the mer-people are burrowing into the tunnels connecting our lands. When they have finished their work, the tunnels will collapse and fill with the water of the inner seas. Then your people will be trapped in Konon, to stay there until we return. And when we do return, we will annihilate them for all time. You, Princess Noreen, may take that thought to your death."

Bering passed a quick glance at the girl's face as Staab spoke to her. He saw her features blanch with horror at his words, but then her lips stiffened and she bit back the tremor that had risen to them.

Staab's voice had a gloating note now.

"So the time has come for the final feast of the mer-people. And this will be a joyous occasion. Leulle herself will receive the body of Commander Bering. For she has decreed that he shall be hers. Voda!"

Again the ruler of Takal ordered the guard commander forward. Voda stepped beside the girl and Bering and bowed to the throne. Then he motioned Bering forward with his ray tube, and shoved the girl ahead of him.

Bering moved slowly in the direction Voda had indicated. And he saw that it was toward the great pool in the center of the chamber. He saw the men of Konon standing, their arms now released from their bonds, the soldiers of Takal's guard standing behind them, their ray tubes held ready for instant use.

At the edge of the pool Bering stopped. And beside him the girl also halted. He could hear the girl's breath catch in her throat as she looked at the placid surface of the pool, and Bering felt a chill run through him as he also stared into those seemingly calm depths.

From behind them he heard Staab issue an order from his throne. At once one of the men of Konon was shoved forward on the opposite side of the pool.

There was a loud cry from the man's lips as his body plunged into the water, sending rippled eddying across the surface. Then the man vanished from view.

As the water quickly subsided into its calmness again, Bering heard the girl beside him sob shortly. Then he followed her gaze into the water and saw a weird sight in the depths beneath them.

IN THE crystal clear waters he could make out the thrashing figure of the Konon soldier held in the grasp of a mighty fist. Then he saw the head and shoulders of one of the giant mermen from the depths of the pool. The merman gripped the thrashing body of the soldier, and then followed a scene that was already etched in Bering's memory. The same scene that had taken place in the waters of the lagoon on the surface of the sea. The merman calmly tearing the man's body to pieces and leisurely eating the members . . .

Then suddenly the figure of the merman vanished into the depths, and Bering saw another face in the bottom of the pool that opened into the inner seas. It was the face of Leulle. Leulle to whom he and the girl were to be thrown.

And even as the thought crossed Bering's mind, he heard Ikar Staab issue an order to the guard commander.

"Leulle is ready to receive the first of her offerings. Voda, send the Princess Noreen to the feast!"

Many things crossed Bering's mind in that tense moment before Voda moved. But mainly he remembered

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something the girl had said in their prison cell. He grasped it in his mind and clung to it desperately. It was their only chance, a desperate gamble, but it had to be taken.

Voda moved. He grasped the girl's arm and she shot Bering a single, soul-stirring glance. It was all Bering waited for.

He dove forward and struck Voda on the jaw, sending him staggering backward. And as he moved he heard a chorus of startled shouts rise around him. He knew in a moment a dozen ray tubes would pour numbing fire into his body.

His hands shot out then in a lightning movement and found the heavy forty-five automatic slung in Voda's belt. Bering pulled the gun free as Voda strove to maintain his balance. Then he saw one of the other guards reaching out to shove the girl into the pool.

Bering aimed from the hip and fired.

There was an ear-shattering roar of sound as the heavy gun bucked in Bering's hand. The guard screamed once and toppled into the pool, a bloody hole where the back of his head had been.

Then Bering raised the gun over his head and fired again.

This time the roar filled the chamber where the first sound had not as yet subsided. The sound of the shots numbed Bering's ears, and he looked desperately around him to see if his gamble had worked.

And it had.

The men of Takal were screaming and staggering on their feet, holding their hands to their pain-throbbing ears. As Bering pulled the trigger of the heavy forty-five again he thought of what Noreen had told him, of the sensitized hearing of the Takal people, and the great vibrating machine that was their only fear.

And the roar of sound from the exploding automatic, reverberating through the domed chamber, hit the ears of the Takal soldiers and sent them reeling in agony.

Almost at the same time the girl realized what was happening. She turned to the men of Konon and shouted above the echoing roar of Bering's gun.

"Get their weapons! This is our chance for freedom!"

The men of Konon needed no second command. As a unit they dove upon their staggering captors and tore the ray tubes from their nerveless fingers.

Then Bering had the girl's arm in his pulling her away from the edge of the pool.

"Staab!" she gasped. "Kill him . . ."

BERING turned from her and faced the throne. He was in time to see Staab press a button on the arm of his throne. Then as Bering raised his gun and aimed at the ruler of Takal, the throne suddenly sank into the floor of the chamber with a speeding movement. Bering's finger released from the trigger of his gun helplessly as he saw the throne and Staab vanish from sight. Then a section of stone slid soundlessly over the opening, sealing Staab's exit.

Bering started toward the dais but the girl gripped his arm tightly.

"No! It is no use, Jon! And we have not much time! Staab will be back with more of his guard—we must hurry while we still can get away!"

Bering stopped, realizing that the girl was right. He looked around him and saw that the men of Konon had overcome the numbed guards of Staab, and were using the paralyzing rays on them.

"But where can we go?" Bering asked desperately. "By now Staab will be having the whole palace alerted!"

"There is a way!" the girl cried. "A

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tunnel that leads underground from the palace. But we must hurry!"

She turned and shouted orders to the soldiers of Konon. They pressed around her, eagerness, and a fighting spirit on their faces. Bering felt a sense of respect as he looked at those men. For he knew that they would never give up now without dying first.

Then the girl was running across the floor of the chamber, with Bering following close at her side, the soldiers of Konon bringing up their rear.

Through the great arched entrance of the throne room and down a long winding corridor they ran. Finally the girl stopped before a seemingly blank expanse of wall. Her fingers ran expertly along the smooth stone surface until they came to a narrow chink in the stone. Here she pressed and Bering saw a tiny button in the wall under her finger.

Almost at once the section of wall slid aside and a narrow stone tunnel became visible.

And at the same time, from down the corridor ahead, a group of palace guards rounded a bend and pulled up sharply, their ray guns raised.

But the men of Konon were prepared. Their own ray tubes blasted out streams of orange light and the men at the opposite end of the corridor fell to the floor, their ray tubes falling from nerveless fingers.

Then Noreen motioned them into the tunnel and the soldiers filed through the opening. Bering brought up the rear with the girl and as they entered, she turned and pressed another section of wall. The stone slab slid forward again into place, blocking the opening. Then the girl took one of the ray tubes from a Konon soldier and twisted the knob on its end. Then she pointed it at the spot on the wall where the mechanism was and depressed the end of the tube.

A RED light shot forth, and Bering saw the section of wall with the mechanism pulverize before his eyes. The girl switched off the tube and turned.

"That will stop them from using this same entrance. But we must hurry. Once Staab knows where we have gone he will follow from another route."

Then they were moving down the long tunnel, sloping downward, deeper into the bowels of the palace.

As they walked there was only the sound of their feet on the cold stone floor of the tunnel. There was a tension about them that made talk futile.

And as they walked, thoughts pounded through Bering's mind. He thought of the huge ship that was probably even now being made ready for its terrible voyage. He thought of his men, forced to guide the efforts of Ikar Staab's men, and he wondered what would happen to them.

And he thought of Leulle. Leulle the mermaid who had taunted him with her plans of conquest and orgy.

And then his thoughts faded away as they entered a new section of tunnel. Now the air was cold and damp around them, and beads of moisture dripped from the stone ceiling of the tunnel.

"We are entering the connecting tubes," the girl explained to him as they passed a series of off-shooting tunnels. "The one we are in now leads to the land of my people, Konon. We will be safe in a little while."

They pressed forward faster now, passing other off-shooting tunnels as they progressed.

And then suddenly Bering stopped in his tracks and the others stopped too. There was a strange rumbling sound beneath their feet. It came from somewhere close ahead, and the rumbling grew in volume as they moved forward again. Then the walls of the tunnel be-

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gan to tremble around them, and Bering knew what was happening even as the girl uttered a sharp cry.

"It is the mer-people! They are doing what Staab said they would! They will destroy the connecting tunnel between Konon and Takal!"

Bering nodded grimly as the sounds grew in volume.

"We must hurry!" the girl warned. "We must get through before the tunnel collapses!"

She started forward again but Bering, a sudden determination in his eyes, gripped her arm and shook his head.

"You go ahead with your men, Noreen. You will be safe. There is still time for you to get through the tunnel before the mer-people destroy it."

The girl's eyes widened in shocked surprise.

"But what do you mean, Jon? You are going with us. . ."

Bering shook his head again.

"No, Noreen, if I went with you I would be powerless to return. You know I cannot go—I cannot leave Staab take the ship he has built, and my men . . . Would you have the mer-people reach my world and enslave it as they have done here?"

The girl's eyes dropped from his. "But what can you do, Jon! You are only one man—they are many—you will be killed!"

"That is a chance I will have to take," Bering replied. "Now hurry. Don't think about me. . ."

The girl stiffened. "Very well, Jon, if you must go, then I will go with you. I will send my soldiers back to warn my people in Konon—"

"No, Noreen," Bering interrupted her. "There is no need for you risking your life along with me. I will not have it."

The girl's eyes grew soft. "But it is I who want to be with you, Jon. And if you must go, you will need me to guide you safely through the passages. Now do not argue further with me. I have made up my mind. And time is very important. . ."

A FURTHER protest died on Bering's lips. In his heart he knew that the girl was sealing her death warrant, even as he had sealed his own. But he also knew that he was glad she was to be with him. With the little time they had left. . .

He heard her give sharp orders to the men of Konon. Then the soldiers saluted her and ran down the vibrating tunnel.

The girl moved beside Bering and together they watched the soldiers vanish down the long murky depths of the tunnel. They could hear the vibrations grow louder with each passing second, and they knew that it would only be a matter of moments before the mer-people had bored through the rock from beneath, and then the tunnel would collapse.

But they didn't wait. The girl took Bering's hand and together they fled back up the tunnel the way they had come. Finally the girl turned off at a side shaft in the rock walls and they ran faster down its narrow, twisting length.

"This leads outside the walls of the city," the girl said as they hurried onward. "We will come out at the edge of the forests near the beach."

Bering nodded that he understood and then as they ran a prayer formed in his heart.

For a daring plan had formed in his mind. A plan that had sprung into being a few short minutes before. When he had decided to return to Takal. When he had thought of the huge ship waiting on the beach, ready to take the soldier horde through the ocean depths and to the surface of the Earth.

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And as he thought of it, running swiftly beside the girl, he knew it was a hopeless task for himself. He would have to die. But there was the one slim chance that in dying he might succeed where all else had failed. He had to take that chance. And he thought grimly of the girl at his side. There was a possibility that she too might die with him, unless . . .

Bering's free hand gripped the automatic tightly as he ran.

THEY crouched at the edge of the trees, still and silent, their eyes staring at the huge ship nestling in its framework of girders, ready to slide into the sea.

Bering's eyes squinted through the murky light, a frown on his face. The light had faded until it was almost a twilight on the surface of the Earth. He turned to the girl.

"It's g e t t i n g d a r k e r—is that natural?"

The girl nodded and replied in a low voice. "Yes, the light of Maracot Deep is an electrical force in the center of the planet. At times it becomes weaker. It is at such times that the people of our world sleep. Does it disturb you, Jon?"

Bering shook his head. "No, I was just wondering about it. I'm glad it's not very light. For what I have in mind we'll need all the luck we can manage to get."

The girl gripped his arm suddenly, pointing to the gates of the city.

"Look! It is Ikar Staab at the head of his Army!"

Bering followed her pointing finger and nodded. Yes, it was Ikar Staab, the ruler of the bubble world of Takal. Leading his men toward the huge submarine craft. And as he watched, the soldiers of Takal slowly mounted a series of steps in the girdered framework that surrounded the vessel. And with Staab at their head they crossed the deck of the ship to enter it, looking like midgets on the back of a metal giant.

"Soon it will be too late!" the girl warned him. "They will leave shortly, Jon. What do you plan to do?"

Bering's eyes had fastened on a small group of men on the opposite side of the giant submarine. Even in the murky light, and at a distance he could make them out to be the crew members of his own ship. And as his eyes watched them, they suddenly were herded up a long ramp toward one of the gaping torpedo tubes. Then Bering watched as they vanished into the tube.

His eyes switched to the other torpedo tube on the opposite side of the bow. He could see a long cylindrical object resting in the tube, and he knew what it was even as his eyes rested on it.

His own ship. Just as Ikar Staab had predicted. Ready to be launched from the torpedo tube when the time came on the surface of the Pacific.

And then he turned to the girl, holding her hand gently.

"The time has come, Noreen," he said. "I will leave you here. You cannot come with me any further. The risk—"

"I am coming with you, Jon. I have said I will die with you if need be. Do not try and make me stay. I will not . . ."

Then she was on her feet beside him and Bering sighed, releasing her hand. He knew he had tried. And there was still a chance that she might live . . .

He moved cautiously out from the edge of the forest then, the girl at his side. They moved in the thick shadows that grew longer with each passing moment, hiding their figures as they advanced on the ship at the beach.

And as they advanced, Bering saw that the sands were practically deserted

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now. The men of Takal had all entered the ship, made ready for departure. Only a few guards stood at the base of the giant framework beside the now idle ray machines.

Slowly Bering and the girl advanced upon them, crouching low as they came. Then they were but a few feet away when one of the guards turned and saw them.

A shout of warning rose to the man's lips and the others turned.

BUT the girl's hand rose swiftly and the ray tube in her fingers shot out a stream of orange light. It caught the guards before they could raise their own weapons, and they sank to the ground in numbed pain.

"Quickly!" Bering said to the girl. "Up the ramp and into the torpedo tube!"

Then he crossed around the fallen bodies of the guards and followed the girl swiftly up the ramp.

As they ran, Bering became aware of a rising hum of sound from the bowels of the huge ship. The motors were being started! In a few moments, if he had guessed the strategy of Staab correctly, the ship would be synchronized to the gravitational quirk of Takal. Then the huge vessel would float out to deep waters where it would safely submerge.

Then they had reached the top of the sloping ramp and were edging cautiously along the huge interior of the torpedo tube.

Ahead, Bering could see the sealing door of the tube was still open, and a stream of light was pouring from the interior of the torpedo room. He knew they had to reach that door before it was closed.

The girl moved closer beside him now, her tense body touching his as they crossed the remaining distance to the opening ahead.

And then the huge sealing door began to close.

Bering gripped the girl's fingers in his and sprinted toward the diminishing opening.

At the last instant he slipped through it, the girl after him, and he stood, his gun held ready just inside the entrance.

His eyes took in the great chamber in a single glance. There were racks of giant torpedoes on both sides of the room, ready for instant use in the torpedo tubes behind him. And in a far corner of the room, huddled in a compact group, were his men, a group of guards standing around, ray tubes held menacingly.

In that moment Bering heard a shout of alarm from the guard who had been operating the torpedo door. He saw the other guards begin to turn their heads in their direction, and the girl beside him raised her deadly ray tube.

Again the weapon spat out a stream of orange light. And as the foremost guards fell to the floor of the ship, Bering let out a shout.

"All right, men! Grab their weapons! Attack!"

Even as the words left his lips he saw Clark dive forward and wrestle a ray tube from the hands of a startled guard. Then the ensign had turned the weapon on his closest guard and a stab of light shot from the weapon.

And the other members of Bering's crew were just as swift to act. With the element of surprise on their side it was only a matter of moments before the last Takal soldier was writhing on the floor in numbed agony.

Bering let out a deep breath as he saw that the torpedo room was now theirs. And he was glad he had not had to use his own forty-five. The thunder of the weapon would have given the alarm in adjoining sections of

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the ship. As it was, the battle had moved almost soundlessly, and was now over.

Clark came running across the floor of the torpedo room, an astonished look on his face.

"Commander—sir—we thought you were dead!"

Bering let a wry smile cross his lips. "I nearly was, Clark. But we don't have any time here to talk. We've got to move fast."

AS HE talked, his eyes swept to a large screen on the far wall of the torpedo chamber. The screen was flickering with light, and then it cleared. He saw the ship floating in the air over the water, and slowly settling toward the surface.

"Quick! Seal the torpedo chamber!"

One of the crew members dashed to the controls and the huge circular door swung shut and locked into place.

Bering spoke rapidly then.

"You men—into our submarine! Open that tube! To your battle stations and await further orders!"

The sailors leaped at his command and the opposite torpedo tube opened and they filed through the opening. Then only Clark and the girl stood beside Bering.

Bering turned to Clark. "Listen, Mister, and get my orders straight. You'll take the Princess Noreen with you. I'll stay behind and seal the door after you leave. We have one chance to stop this plan of the mer-people and Ikar Staab. And that one chance is to blow the hole in the ocean floor shut just as it was blown open.

"When I see on the screen that we're nearly there I'll fire the number one tube, releasing our ship. You'll make tracks away from there at full speed. The mer-people will probably try and stop you, and you may not get away alive, but it's your only chance. Noreen will be able to tell you how to reach the bubble of Konon and safety."

Clark's eyes were wide with astonishment.

"But you, sir . . ."

"I'm staying behind," Bering said grimly. Somebody has to see that you get away before this ship blows up. And that's exactly what's going to happen. I'll set time fuses on these torpedoes to explode just as we reach the opening in the ocean floor. Then—"

"No, Jon, no!" The girl let out a sharp cry.

Bering ignored her and motioned to Clark. "Carry out my orders, Mister. Take Noreen with you. Hurry!"

Clark looked from the girl to Bering and then a sober expression crossed his face.

"Aye, sir," he said slowly and took the girl's hand.

NOREEN struggled to release herself but Bering took her other hand and led her to the half-open torpedo chamber on the opposite side of the room. He walked just inside the tube and stood for a lingering moment staring at her.

Words rose to his lips as he saw tears in the girl's eyes. And then suddenly she was in his arms, her lips pressed feverishly to his.

Bering held her for a single long moment.

Then suddenly he heard a clanging noise behind him.

He tore himself from the girl's embrace and turned to the torpedo room door.

It was almost shut, and he could see Clark, on the other side of it, shoving the huge metal door into place.

"Clark! Stop it, man!" Bering shouted and ran to the door, putting his weight against it.

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"It's no use, sir!" Clark's voice came hoarsely to him as the door edged closer into its sealed niche. "This is my job, sir! I helped these devils make this ship—now I'll do my bit to destroy it! Good luck, Commander!"

And the heavy circular door swung shut, sealing the tube.

Bering stood for a single instant, refusing to believe what had occurred. Then a swelling pride burst within him and he turned to the girl, gripping her hand.

"We've got to hurry, Noreen. I didn't plan it this way, but . . ."

His voice trailed off and he helped the girl up the ladder on the side of the submarine. Then they were running across the deck of the ship and mounting the ladder of the conning tower.

Even as they did so, Bering felt the huge mother vessel tilt sharply. And ahead he heard the rush of waters closing over the prow of the submarine. Already the water was rushing into the tube.

He lowered the girl swiftly down the interior of the conning tower, and then followed himself. He reached over his head and swung the lid shut behind him, spinning the locking wheel.

Then he was in the control room of his own ship, issuing orders.

Finally he turned to stare at the girl. She was standing watching him, a tense expression in her eyes. He smiled softly at her and moved to her side.

"We can only wait now, Noreen. Only wait."

IT SEEMED like years sped by as Bering stood at the controls of the periscope, waiting. Each second was a dragging eternity, and always the sound of rushing power welled through the tiny submarine from the mother ship as it sped through the waters of the inner seas.

And then finally there was another sound. A whooshing hiss of sound, and Bering was almost thrown off his feet by a sudden acceleration.

Clark had depressed the firing lever! The thought sped through his mind. The submarine was being shot from the tube of the mother ship!

"Full throttle!" Bering rapped out the command as the submarine steadied from its initial burst of speed away from the huge ship. "Prepare tubes!"

Then, as the motors of the tiny craft bit into the water, Bering worked the controls of the periscope, fastening his eye to the glass.

What met his eyes was a chilling sight. The tiny craft had shot away from the giant ship and was moving faster away with each passing second. And the great submarine was turning straight for the opening in the ocean floor. Turning, while around it swam a myriad number of the giant mer-people!

And then they saw his ship in the same instant.

He saw the great figure of Leulle detach itself from the main group surrounding the mother ship, and another mer-woman followed her.

Bering's hands gripped the controls of the periscope in a tense moment, for he knew that if Leulle reached them before—

And then it came.

A terrible numbing concussion of sound that vibrated like thunder.

Bering gazed into the periscope and saw the mother ship, in the ocean floor opening, suddenly disintegrate in a flashing burst of explosive force.

The pressure of the explosion hurled the tiny submarine through the water, and it was saved from annihilation only by the intervening bodies of the mer-people.

As Bering looked, he saw the mer-

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people torn to pieces under the terrific blast, and the mountainous rocky walls of the opening in the ocean floor crashed down, obscuring the sight from his eyes.

After long moments the submarine steadied itself its metal plates groaning in protesting agony from the terrific shock wave.

Then Bering looked into the glass again.

THE hole in the ocean floor was sealed. Bits of pulverized wreckage from the exploded giant submarine floated crazily through the water around him, glinting dully in the phosphorescent light of Maracot Deep.

And then he saw something else.

Coming toward him, in the waters of the inner sea, a flashing, angry giant form.

Leulle!

The mermaid's face was a grimace of hate and rage as she swam swiftly toward the submarine, her long arms reaching out, ready to tear the frail craft to pieces when she reached it.

Bering's fingers tightened on the controls of the periscope as he computed the distance.

"Ready tube one!" he snapped the command out.

And as he watched the mermaid draw closer, he heard his order relayed.

Then he waited for a long moment. He saw the mermaid reach toward the submarine. In another twenty seconds she would have it in her grasp.

"Fire!"

There was a whoosh of sound as the number one torpedo shot from its tube. And Bering, his eyes fastened to the glass of the periscope, saw the missile streak straight toward the mermaid.

And in that instant the mermaid saw the torpedo flashing toward her.

She tried to streak out of its way at the last moment before it struck her. But her anger had made her forget caution. And she was too late.

The torpedo struck her high on her breast and exploded.

There was a flashing light that half blinded Bering for a moment, and the close proximity of the explosion caused the submarine to groan with the concussion.

Then it was over.

Bering saw tattered pieces of the mermaid floating in the swirling waters of the inner sea. And then the submarine had streaked past the spot of the explosion.

Wearily, Bering straightened from his position before the periscope. He turned to see the girl watching him, her eyes wide, her lips trembling in tense expectation.

"It's finished, Noreen," Bering said quietly. "Leulle is dead . . ."

The girl drew her breath in sharply. "And the rest of the mer-people . . ."

Bering nodded, a great tiredness creeping over him. "Yes. They too. Clark did his job well. The ocean floor is sealed . . ."

The girl moved over beside him, and touched his arm with her hand.

"Then it means you cannot return to your people, Jon. You can never go back to the surface world . . ."

He looked at her. "That is true, Noreen," he said. "All of us in this ship must remain in Maracot Deep. Our people will never know the story of what happened to us. They will simply say that our submarine vanished on a routine mission in the Pacific . . ."

The girl's eyes were misty as she stared at him.

"But your men will find a home with my people, Jon. There is much to do in Konon . . ."

He nodded slowly. "Yes, I know. They will start a new life there."

The girl's hand crept up hesitantly

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and touched his cheek.

"And you, Jon, will you be happy—with us?"

The tiredness left Jon Bering then as he smiled into Noreen's tear-streaked eyes.

And he folded her gently into his arms.

THE END

In The Beginning . . .

★ By H. R. Stanton ★

A FAR cry from the modern scientific story of the formation of the universe, is the idea of the ancient Greeks on that matter, but it is no less fascinating. The Greeks had many different theories even as we have today, but one major one seems to have taken precedence over the others.

This theory assumed that in the beginning the world was formed of shapeless elements called Chaos—incidentally, it will be noticed how so many common words stem from the Greek—milling about formlessly in space. These elements, this Chaos, separated into two distinct entities—by what means we are not told—into the heavens and the earth. The basic deities of the Greeks then became Uranus, the Heavens, and Ge, the Earth. Uranus thus was the deity of light and heat, purity and omnipresence, while Ge, the life-sustaining, was the mother of all, the providing essence of motherhood.

Everywhere in ancient Grecian cities temples have been found erected to Ge, the most universally worshipped of the basic Greek gods. Incidentally it is of interest to note that the early Greeks regarded the Earth as a flat circle whose center was Greece. Oceanus encircled the outer edges, and into this river poured the Mediterranean and the Euxine (Black Sea). In any event, Uranus and Ge united, intermarried. This is a beautiful poetic allusion, and figuratively speaking it is true. If there was any chance of slipping in the elements of beauty, the Greeks were sure to do it.

The first child of Uranus and Ge was Oceanus, the encircling ocean stream mentioned above. The ocean actually is produced by the influence of heaven and earth and if we allow considerable latitude in the ancient Greek interpretation we come to the conclusion that their ideas were not so fanciful as might first be supposed.

The other children of Ge and Uranus were much more ethereal than Oceanus, that rugged son of the gods. In between Uranus and Ge came first Aether (our ether) that rarified substance filling all space and which was the breathing material of the immortals alone. Then came Air (Aer) a much coarser substance which sufficed for us poor mortals.

Aether and Aer were isolated from each other by cloud-like entities or divinities called Nephelae. Ge delivered herself of others of course. There were Pontus (the Sea), and a host of sea-deities among them Cetos and Phorcys.

It is of the greatest interest to note the source of so many of our words, ancient Grecian words which have filtered into all the western languages including English, German, French, Italian and Spanish.

The original Chaos delivered a couple of other divinities who were the contrasting foils of Heaven and Earth, Uranus and Ge. They were Erebus (Darkness) and Nyx (Night). Erebus ruled the underworld, that dim, unlit, cavernous land which saw nothing ever of light or cheeriness.

It is a peculiar fact that the Greeks did not set up any logical system for intermarriage. It seems as if everyone of these entities married every other one. Thus, Uranus joined Nyx, their children being Eos (Dawn), also called Aurora, and Hemera (Daylight).

Uranus and Ge delivered some other weird creatures called Titans and Giants. The Giants were the personification of sheer strength. The Giants could shake the Earth, could cause terrible disasters and so on. They were equipped with one hundred and fifty heads and a hundred arms. They were named Briareus, Cottus and Gyges.

The Titans on the other hand were more generously endowed with intelligence. They had beautiful names which still survive in our astronomy. They are among the names of the Moons of Saturn and other Solar System planets. We have Oceanus, Ceos, Crios Hyperion, Iapetus, Cronus, Theia, Themis, Mnemiosyne, Phoebe and Tethys.

The story goes that Uranus hated his crude offspring, the Giants, and hurled them into an underworld, Tartarus, a submarine dungeon. But Ge—like women everywhere and in every time—opposed him so she organized a conspiracy to rescue the Giants. Led by Titan Cronus, Uranus was wounded by an attack of the Titans. From the blood of Uranus' wound sprang up a new group of Giants who overthrew Uranus and led by Cronus, took over the rule of Uranus' domain.

Cronus ruled like a tryrant. He fought against his brother Titans, defeated them, sent them to Tartarus and ruled with the Giants instead of his own Titans. In a word he was the first traitor.

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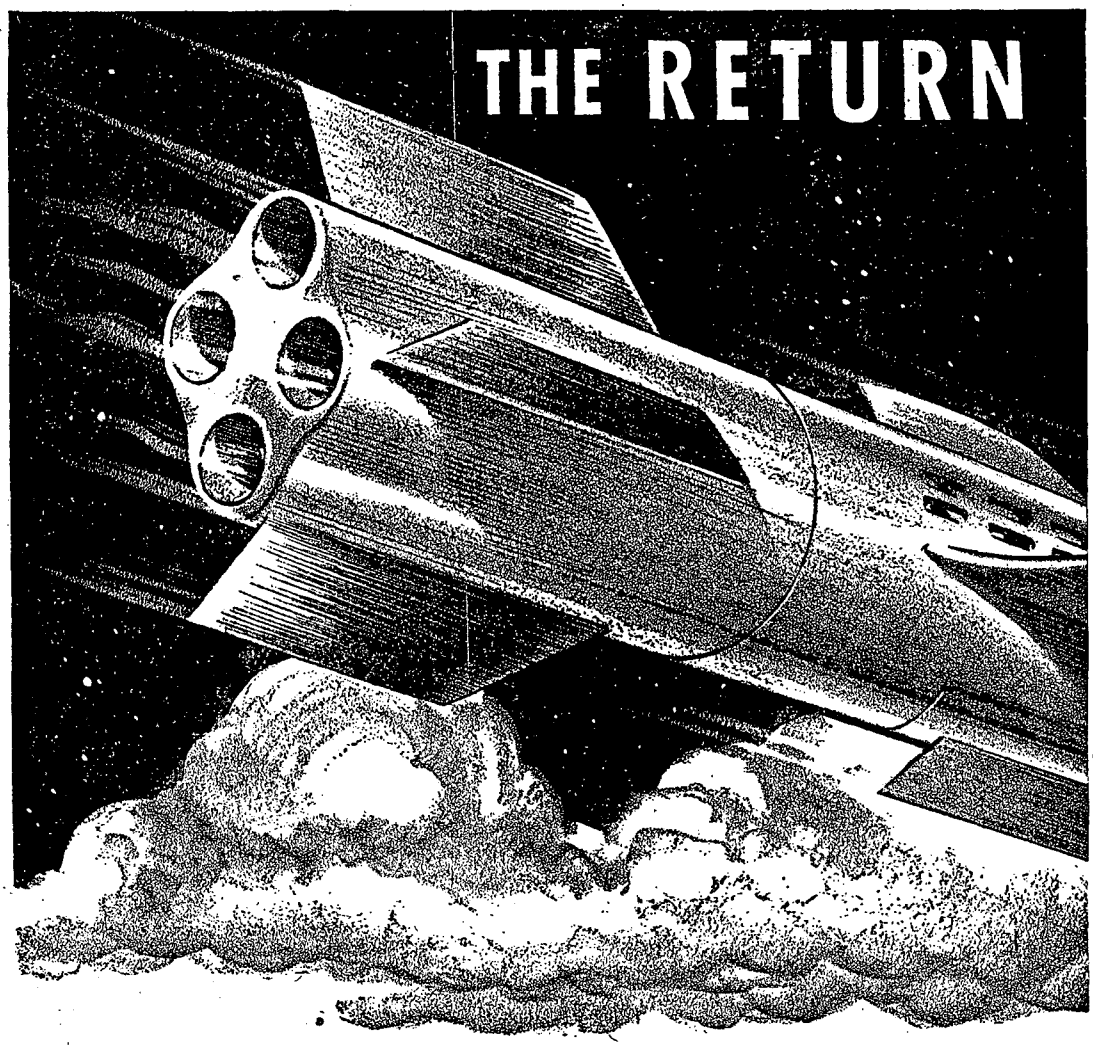
THE RETURN



"IT'S going to happen any second now!" Lanning whispered.

Arvin shifted in unease before the telescreen. "I can feel it. If something should go wrong . . ."

Tension was building up within the ship, a charged tension like a force invisibly alive and menacing. And then —it came.

There was a sudden *twisting,* brief and instantaneous, as though every atom of the ship and those within it had reversed its field. The outlines of the control room shimmered with a momentary distortion.

The gray nothingness of hyperspace vanished abruptly as the *Valiant* emerged once more into normal space. And in the telescreen, saucer-sized and yellowish-white, the disc of a sun flamed into being.

Hastily Lanning adjusted the filter controls, then peered at the image in the telescreen intently. He spoke in a rush of eagerness.

"That's Ishtar, all right! And there, Jim—off to one side. See it?"

Arvin squinted, and then a grin leaped into his face. "Yes—I see it now! Saoh. . . . The planet looks like

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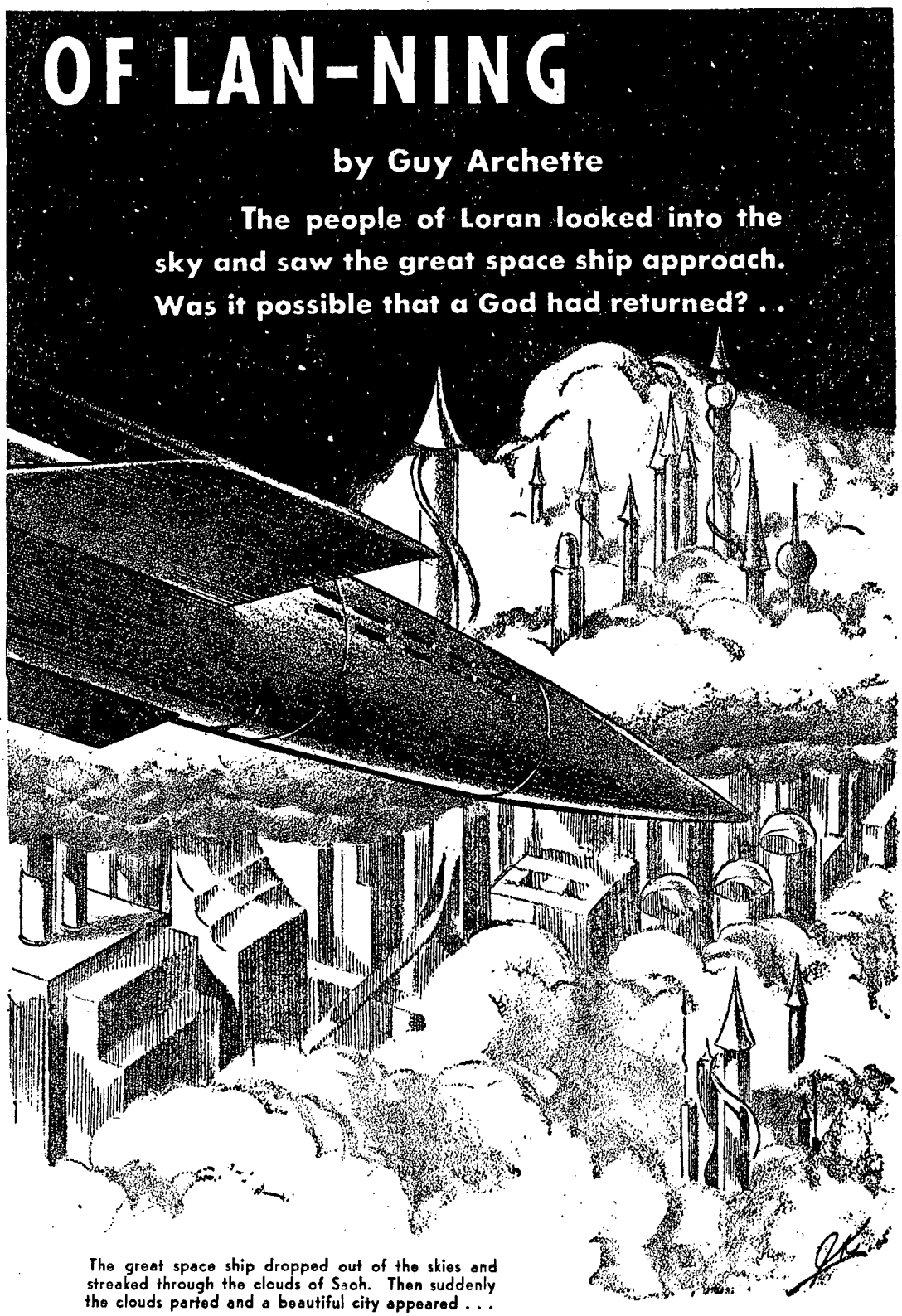
OF LAN-NING

by Guy Archette

The people of Loran looked into the sky and saw the great space ship approach. Was it possible that a God had returned? . .



The great space ship dropped out of the skies and streaked through the clouds of Saoh. Then suddenly the clouds parted and a beautiful city appeared . . .

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a bit of bright green glass at this distance."

"Thirty years . . ." Lanning said softly. "I wonder what changes they've brought to Saoh?"

"Not many, I'd say," Arvin mused. "No doubt we'll find the natives still living in their little villages of wooden huts."

"But *the* village, Jim. Loran . . . where we stayed for almost a year. Remember, the life spans of the natives were very short—only four or five years at the most. And your hair is gray, Jim, as is mine, and our faces are lined. One generation has passed for us—but more than six for the natives of Saoh . . . more than six for those in Loran. There will undoubtedly be changes."

Arvin nodded slowly. "It's been a long time since we were carefree young men, roaming space in the *Wanderer*. Thirty years to us . . . over a hundred and eighty to the people of Loran. Yes—it's likely there will be many changes."

"I wonder if we've been forgotten?" Lanning went on. "And the tools and the technical knowledge that we left behind in Loran—have they been forgotten, too?"

"We'll learn the answers soon enough." Arvin glanced at Lanning in bluff sympathy. "I know how you feel, you old spacehound . . . like going home. I'm wondering about a lot of things myself. For instance, will there be black hair and red among the golden heads of the natives in Loran? Remember the beautiful girls—Renn-lea and Saen-dra?"

"Yes, Jim. How could I have forgotten them?" Lanning looked back at the telescreen, and the film of memory deepened in his faded blue eyes. He sighed. Within him was nostalgic longing for those wonderful days of his youth, spent among the golden-haired, golden-skinned and very friendly people of Saoh.

Commander Dunlop stepped down from the navigator's platform nearby and approached Lanning.

"Well, we seem to be here," he said in his crisp, precise tone. "And at last, I might add. Even with the Hyperspace Drive to eat up the distance, I thought we'd never reach this forsaken part of the Universe." He gestured at the telescreen. "Are you sure this sun is the one you remember?"

Lanning nodded quickly. "I'm positive, Commander. That's Ishtar—the same as the day I last saw it."

Dunlop looked only slightly reassured. Lanning knew the efficient young officer considered him a sentimental old fool—though a useful old fool, perhaps.

"The main screens show two planets circling the sun," Dunlop resumed. "The innermost, I suppose, is the one you call Saoh. Is that where we'll find the cosmium deposits?"

LANNING nodded. "Jim Arvin and I found vast deposits of the element while we were on Saoh. No doubt it's still there. No record exists of anyone having discovered Saoh since Jim Arvin and I left it."

"That must have been all of thirty years ago, according to what you've told me already." Dunlop frowned thoughtfully. "I don't understand it, Lanning. If those cosmium deposits are as large as you say, then you and Arvin could have made yourselves enormously rich by mining them. Why did you wait until the war between Earth and the star colonies broke out before you decided to release the information?"

"You haven't lived on Saoh, Commander," Lanning answered slowly.

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"It's a beautiful world, and its people are simple and unspoiled. Jim Arvin and I didn't want to change that. We knew that the news of our cosmium discovery would start a rush to Saoh. It would mean the planet being made ugly by mining towns and refining plants and space ports. It would mean the people being exploited and cheated, as extra-terrestrial races have always been. No . . . we didn't want that. We decided to keep our knowledge secret, unless it became vitally important for Earth to know."

A hint of contempt appeared in the slight twisting of Dunlop's mouth. "If Saoh is all that you say it is, I don't see why you didn't settle there permanently."

Lanning shook his head. "Jim Arvin and I considered that at first. We even married a couple of native girls. Then we learned that the life spans of the natives were far shorter than our own . . . six years at the most. In the year we spent on Saoh we saw our wives begin to grow old. We saw native friends dying. And—well, under the circumstances we had no desire to stay. It isn't pleasant to know that those you love will always be changing, dying, flitting away from you like elusive shadows."

"I'd say that depends on the point of view." Dunlop shrugged. "Just how friendly are the natives, Lanning? Will they prove to be dangerous to us in any way?"

"Not in the slightest," Lanning said swiftly. He gazed at the younger man in dawning apprehension. "I know a soldier comes to expect trouble in every situation, Commander—but I hope you aren't just looking for an excuse to use the *Valiant's* weapons against a harmless race of people."

"Not unless they attempt to obstruct my mission." Dunlop looked grim and determined. "Earth needs that cosmium, Lanning—and Earth is going to get it. The star colonies have control of all the known sources of the element, which means that Earth can hope for victory only by obtaining supplies of her own.

"You know what will happen if the star colonies win, Lanning. The Empire will be divided into dozens of independent sun systems, and these will begin fighting among themselves. A dark age will descend like nothing ever known before in all history. Earth is fighting to prevent that mainly, and not out of any selfish motives of wanting to hold the Empire together for her own profit, as the colonies claim. The colonies aren't ready for independence yet, but they refuse to see it that way."

"You're right, of course," Lanning said, nodding. "That's exactly the reason why Jim Arvin and I volunteered our information about the cosmium deposits on Saoh to the government when the war began. With a large supply of the element in her possession, victory for Earth is assured."

"But a supply must be obtained to begin with," Dunlop reminded coldly. "Don't forget that. Nothing must be allowed to interfere—sentiment and personal feelings least of all." He made an impatient gesture. "One thing more, Lanning. Do the natives of Saoh use cosmium in any way?"

Lanning nodded, a reflective smile momentarily replacing his uneasy expression. "They do—that is, in the village of Loran. You see, Jim Arvin and I used a tiny atomic generator for lighting purposes while we were in Loran, and the natives showed so much interest in it, that we gave it to them when we left. The generator was run by cosmium, and no doubt they mine small quantities of the element to keep it going."

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DUNLOP gazed at Lanning in a bleakly speculative fashion, then nodded curtly and turned away. Lanning winced inwardly at the disgust which had showed so plainly on the youthful commander's face. No doubt, he realized, Dunlop now considered him even more a sentimental old fool than before.

Glancing at Arvin, Lanning saw in the other's face an echo of the foreboding that filled his own mind. "Jim, I'm afraid somehow . . . afraid for the people of Saoh. Dunlop seems completely without sympathy much less patience."

Arvin moved his head in a somber, slow nod. "I wish the defense council had placed some other officer in charge of the expedition. Dunlop is too much of a soldier. He thinks in terms of force . . . of killing."

A softly throbbing sound vibrated suddenly throughout the *Valiant* as the normal space atomic drive rockets were put into operation. Lanning turned once more to the telescreen. All sense of passing time left him as he watched Saoh swell into size. And as he watched, the golden memories passed through his mind again, like a whisper of revered old music.

Before long, the *Valiant* was circling Saoh in a tightening orbit. And then the sleek war cruiser was descending through the planet's atmospheric envelope.

Lanning and Arvin, because of their familiarity with the geographical details of Saoh, aided the pilot in choosing a landing place near the village of Loran. First they guided the ship down to a rectangular continent on the sunward side, then along a mountain chain, to the nearer shore of a large lake. For a time they followed the shore—and then Lanning pointed excitedly.

"There it is—Loran!" he cried.

Enclosed on all sides by towering mountains was a broad valley, and within this, surrounded by the green and gold of farmlands, were numerous buildings. Though still hazy with distance, the scene was exquisite in its miniature perfection. It was a pleasant sight to look upon.

With a definite destination now in sight, the pilot sent the *Valiant* soaring toward the valley. The tiny cluster of buildings separated and grew swiftly in size.

Lanning's gaze was fastened eagerly to the telescreen. Abruptly he gasped and clutched at Arvin's arm.

"Jim—look!"

But Arvin was already aware of what had startled Lanning. His eyes were wide.

"Why, that can't be Loran!" he exclaimed.

It was true. The settlement was not the tiny one of wooden huts that they remembered. Spread before their eyes was a large city, with buildings of gleaming, white stone.

"Could we have made a mistake?" Arvin muttered in bewilderment. "Perhaps there are two closely similar locations like this on Saoh, and we happened to choose the wrong one by chance."

Lanning shook his head slowly. "No, Jim, this is the right place. I'm sure of it. The curve of the shoreline is the same, as are those twin mountain peaks overlooking the valley. We haven't made a mistake. It's just that Loran has changed."

"Thirty years to us . . . one-hundred and eighty to the people of Loran," Arvin mused softly. "Yes—a change like this could very well have taken place during that time."

Lanning's eyes glowed with admiration and awe. "The tools and the technical knowledge we left behind—the

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people of Loran made good use of them. I had known the years would bring changes, Jim, but I hadn't expected any like these."

The patterned farmlands slid away beneath the great, shining hull of the *Valiant*. Then the war cruiser was over the city itself. Very slowly it circled over the jewel-like little metropolis, while Dunlop, his eyes watchful and cold, peered intently into the telescreen.

Finally he nodded. "Look's safe enough," he grunted. "No weapons that I can see. We'll land at once."

Lanning stared at Arvin, apprehension twisting his face like a pain. "Why, Dunlop expected danger from Loran, Jim! Danger! He just won't believe that the natives are friendly and kind. Jim—I don't like this. . . ."

Arvin shook his head somberly. "Dunlop is a soldier; Bruce—and killing is in his blood. I'm afraid myself . . . afraid for the people of Loran. The weapons of the *Valiant* could reduce the city to ashes in a matter of minutes. And Dunlop evidently would not hesitate to use them, however slight the provocation."

THE pilot chose a meadow on the outskirts of the city for a landing place, and here, on soft green turf, the *Valiant* settled down to rest. Dunlop turned to the inter-ship communicator.

"Gun crews will remain at battle stations until further notice," he said crisply. "Secondary force screens will remain on, until the order is given for them to be withdrawn."

A sudden surge of anger impelled Lanning forward. "What is the meaning of this, Commander?" he demanded. "Haven't I assured you that the people of this world are entirely harmless?"

"I have your word for it," Dunlop replied coldly. "But I'm taking no chances. Every precaution will be observed until I am personally certain about the matter."

"But it's unnecessary!" Lanning returned in protest. "Your actions will only bring suspicion and dislike on us."

Dunlop straightened rigidly, his tone curt and harsh. "Lanning, let me remind you that I am in command of this ship. If I need your advice, I'll ask for it." With a final glare from his flashing dark eyes, Dunlop turned and strode away.

Lanning bit his lip, moving his shoulders in a gesture of futility. Foreboding rose in him again. He knew that he could not make Dunlop understand, and he knew it was no use trying. Dunlop did not have the golden memories. He did not have the exciting knowledge that many of the people of Loran carried his blood in their veins. Nor did he have the feeling of achievement that came with the knowledge that the city had been built with the tools and the science that he himself had given the builders. Had he been aware of these things, he would have felt, as did Lanning, that the city was a part of himself —that, in a sense, it was home.

For over an hour the *Valiant* lay motionless within the meadow. Dunlop had once more taken up his position before the telescreen. He stood watching, his dark eyes narrowed and alert. Lanning and Arvin watched, too, though impatience burned within them at this delay in disembarking.

The meadow was filling with natives as though the war cruiser were a center of irresistible attraction. From the city, in all directions, they came. Shortly the vessel was surrounded by a shifting, murmuring crowd, whose bright, robe-like garments made a riot of color.

Dunlop turned at last, nodding curtly at Lanning and Arvin. "No signs of hostility that I can see. The natives

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seem just curious and excited. We'll go out and talk to them."

The successive doors of the airlock were opened, and then the gangplank was run out. Preceded by a squad of armed soldiers, Dunlop descended from the ship. Lanning and Arvin followed close behind him.

A deep silence fell almost instantly over the assembled natives. They froze in all their individual positions, staring with wide eyes and parted mouths, an attitude as strikingly human as were their physical appearances.

Dunlop turned to Lanning. "All right, let's get down to business. Explain why we're here and what we want."

Lanning nodded quickly. With a touch at Arvin's arm, he stepped forward.

"Greetings, people of Loran! Who is your leader, that we may speak with him?"

THE silence seemed to deepen further at Lanning's words. Then excitement gripped the crowd. There were cries of amazement, followed by sudden ripples of motion. The babble deepened and rose, then abruptly faded.

A lane opened in the crowd before Lanning. Down it and toward him came a group of natives. Leading them was one whose hair was as black as a raven's wing.

Lanning whirled to Arvin. "Jim—do you see?" he asked, his tone hushed and eager. "His hair!"

Arvin grinned and nodded. "Black, Bruce—black as your hair used to be. Then there *is* black hair and red among the people of Loran."

The group of natives halted before Lanning. Their black-haired leader stepped forward.

"Greetings, stranger," he said. "Who are you that you know both the name and the tongue of Loran?"

The leader was little more than a youth, but very straight and confident, with the light of Ishtar gleaming on his raven hair. His features had a disturbing familiarity. They might have been the features that had met Lanning's eyes in a mirror thirty years earlier. And realizing this, Lanning felt at once a warmth and a strange diffidence.

"I am no stranger to Loran," he said. "What is your name, leader of the city?"

"I am called Reah-nor."

"And I am Lan-ning. Has this generation forgotten me?"

Reah-nor stared in astonishment. A flurry of excitement rippled through the crowd behind him. A murmuring wave of sound broke over them and then stilled.

A feeling of cold struck through Lanning. There was no recognition in the faces before him, no responding smiles of joy. There was only shock and disbelief, and now a slow dawning of hostility.

Lanning glanced anxiously at Reah-nor. "What is wrong? Has the name of Lan-ning become unwelcome here?"

Reah-nor shook his raven head slowly. "Neither unwelcome nor forgotten. His temples are numerous on Saoh, and the largest and most beautiful of them is here in Loran. The city you see before you now is but one result of his teachings. Everywhere on Saoh we revere his name, and thus what you have said we regard as a sacrilege."

"A sacrilege!" Lanning exclaimed. "But why?"

"Because you cannot possibly be Lan-ning," Reah-nor said simply.

Lanning turned to Arvin, and there was on the features of the other the same expression of dazed dismay that twisted his own. Arvin shrugged help-

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lessly.

"What is it?" Dunlop demanded. "What is wrong?" Unable to understand the swift exchange of words which had taken place in the soft, liquid language of Saoh, the commander of the *Valiant* was bewildered.

Lanning explained quickly. Dunlop's face became grim.

"I'd been counting on the co-operation of the natives through their memories of you," he said harshly. "But if they won't acknowledge you, then we'll have to use force. Remember, Lanning, Earth needs that cosmium—and Earth is going to get it. I won't let the natives stand in the way of that."

Anxiety was strong and urgent within Lanning. He had not imagined that his identity would be doubted, but he had feared that some circumstance would arise which would make it necessary for Dunlop to use force. That circumstance seemed to have appeared.

He wondered if there were some means whereby he could obtain the needed cosmium from the natives without the requirement of establishing his identity among them. Perhaps a bargain of some kind could be reached. On a less civilized world this would not have been necessary. They could merely have taken what they wanted and left. But the people of Saoh—or those in Loran, at least—had clearly reached a high level of development, and honor demanded that they be dealt with as one civilized race deals with another.

A bargain had to be the answer, Lanning knew. If this were not possible, then the only other alternative was force . . . force which would mean the destruction of Loran and its inhabitants.

DESPERATELY Lanning turned back to Reah-nor. He leaned forward, intense with the urgency that drove him.

"I have said that I am Lan-ning. Once again I insist that I am him. Why would it be my purpose to deceive you?"

Reah-nor shrugged his slim shoulders. "That I would not know—but I do know that you cannot be Lan-ning."

"And why not, leader of the city?"

"Because legend says Lan-ning was a young man, tall and straight, with hair black even as my own. You are not young—that is plain to see. Age weighs upon you, and your hair is white. Thus you cannot be Lan-ning."

"All men age, leader of the city—even Lan-ning. You seem to have overlooked this."

Cries and shouts of protest rose from the natives. Reah-nor quieted them with a wave of one hand. To Lanning he said, "Lan-ning was a god, and all know that a god is immortal and does not age or change."

"Has your experience with gods been so great that you know this to be absolutely true?" Lanning demanded softly.

Reah-nor looked shaken. "I admit that I do not know. Nor does anyone, for that matter. But for twelve *ptahs* Lan-ning dwelt here in Loran. During that time men and women grew old and babies became youths. Yet he changed by not even so much as a hair."

"Does that prove immortality or godhood?" Lanning demanded again. "Suppose that Lan-ning aged even as yourselves—but more slowly? Suppose that what was twelve *ptahs* to you was but one *ptah* to him?"

Reah-nor stared wordlessly. Emotions flitted like shadows over his face—surprise, consternation, then reluctant understanding. He gave the impression of one whose faith in a lifelong belief has been shaken to the very core.

Lanning saw this as his opportunity. Again his soft, urgent voice.

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"If I were not Lan-ning, how would I know these things? How else would I dare say them? And the name and the language of Loran, how could I know them unless I had been here before?"

Abruptly Lanning turned and drew Arvin forward. "And do not the legends also mention Arr-vin, who came with Lan-ning, even as he comes with Lan-ning now?"

Reah-nor was silent. And silent, too, was the crowd behind him. All seemed dazed, stunned, as though the foundations of all they had known to be true were crumbling into ruin about them.

Then Reah-nor turned, entering into low-voiced conversation with the group of natives which accompanied him. They argued with a kind of dignified animation.

Dunlop shifted in growing impatience. "What now?" he demanded of Lanning.

Again Lanning explained what had taken place. He finished, "I'm pretty sure I've convinced them. If not, I don't see anything else we can do, except to bargain with them in some way."

"If they won't co-operate, we'll just take what we want," Dunlop grunted. "Warn them of what will happen if they try to stop us. We've got to get that cosmium—and without any further waste of time."

Pain deepened within Lanning. He knew the crisis had come. Within the next few minutes would be decided the fate of Loran and its inhabitants. For if Dunlop were unable to obtain the vital element by peaceful means, he would turn unhesitatingly to the weapons of the *Valiant* and wipe out all opposition.

LANNING dreaded this as much as he did the destruction of his own people on distant Earth. He knew that Earth would soon be helpless without an immediate supply of cosmium—even now the atomic engines of its war ships and arms plants were operating on fast-dwindling reserves.

He was torn between two loyalties—to the cause of Earth on the one hand, and to the safety of the natives of Loran on the other. He knew that Earth and its empire were the more deserving of aid, for an immensely larger number of lives was involved—billions, as against the mere thousands here in Loran. Yet he could not think of the Empire as anything but an abstraction. Loran was of the size which the mind could embrace, for which feelings could be deeper, more personal.

Reah-nor turned. Lanning searched the youth's face, breath held, his body tense.

"We have discussed the matter," Reah-nor said, "and we have reached a decision. We wish it understood that we do not choose arbitrarily to doubt your word, for as is evidenced by the great vessel in which you have arrived, you are one of god-like powers and learning. Yet it is difficult for us to abandon the legend of Lan-ning, which for well over three-hundred *ptahs* we have held as true. However, we are willing to be convinced. If you can prove beyond all doubt that you are indeed Lan-ning, we will gladly serve you and obey your every word."

Lanning felt a sharp thrust of disappointment. Proof! He had already offered all the evidence of his identity which he could summon. He could think of nothing else to do.

"Well?" Dunlop prompted.

Lanning told the other of the decision which had been reached. Dunlop frowned blackly.

"Tell them why we're here, then," he growled. "Explain that we need their

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co-operation. See what they say."

Wearily Lanning again faced Reah-nor. As best he could with the handicaps imposed by the language of Loran, he told of the war raging through the Empire, and how cosmium was needed to hold it together. Fumblingly he described how the element operated the warships and factories of Earth. And finally he explained that it was to obtain cosmium that he had returned with an expedition to Saoh. He pointed out that the co-operation of the natives was urgently needed to mine the element and help load it aboard the *Valiant*.

Reah-nor requested to see a sample of the metal, the name alone having conveyed nothing to him of its identity. Dunlop had one of the last precious bars brought out, and Reah-nor examined it. Finally he looked up, his youthful face grim.

"You will no longer find metal of this sort upon Saoh," he said.

Lanning was stunned. "What do you mean?" he asked anxiously. "What has happened?"

"This metal is sacred to Lan-ning," Reah-nor answered. "It runs the machine which lights the temple here in Loran. Since Lan-ning left, we have gathered this metal wherever it was to be found on Saoh—both on the surface and deep beneath the earth. Now none remains, save that which we have stored in great vaults beneath the temple in Loran. We will relinquish this only if you can prove that you are Lan-ning, as you claim to be."

With that, Reah-nor snapped out commands to the natives, and they left by the various routes by which they had come. Soon the meadow was empty.

Lanning told Dunlop of the ultimatum. "The machine spoken of by Reah-nor is obviously the atomic generator I gave the natives when I left," he added. "Incredibly enough, cosmium has become important enough for the natives to mine and store away, simply because it operates the generator."

Dunlop scowled. "That means we'll have to blast the city apart, if we want any cosmium. Well, I won't hesitate to do so, Lanning. I know my duty—and I won't let anything or anyone stand in the way. I'm not sentimental about the natives here, as you seem to be."

THE commander moved his hand in a sharp gesture. "I intend to start military operations at once. The *Valiant* will be taken up over the city and several buildings will be destroyed as an example of what we can do. If this does not persuade the natives to give up their cosmium, then I will take even more drastic measures."

"Wait," Lanning pleaded. "We've got to give the natives every chance first. Scientifically we're their superiors, and it's the only decent thing to do. Look—give me twenty-four hours. If I can't do something during that time to prove that I'm Lan-ning, then we'll use force."

Dunlop refused to give in at first, but finally he consented. "Very well, I'll give you twenty-four hours," he snapped. "But remember, Lanning, that's all you're going to get. I refuse to indulge your sentiment for the natives any further than that."

Later Lanning and Arvin walked to the upper end of the meadow, toward a grassy ridge, from which the land sloped gently down to the city. Here they stood and looked at Loran, its domes and slender spires gleaming. Evening was deepening swiftly into night. Ishtar was almost gone behind the encircling mountains, and only a few crimson streaks of its presence were left in the darkening sky. A cool wind blew with a gentle sighing through the long grasses.

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"Twenty-four hours," Lanning muttered. "Just twenty-four hours, Jim . . ."

Arvin shrugged in bafflement. "I've racked my brains, Bruce, but I just can't think of anything. What in the world *could* you do to make the natives believe you're really Lan-ning?"

"There must be a way," Lanning said huskily. "There just has to be!"

But when night finally shrouded the valley he was no nearer a solution. He and Arvin walked slowly back to the *Valiant*.

Within his cabin, Lanning paced the floor, unable to sleep. His entire being ached with need for an answer to the problem he faced. A tiny clue, the merest hint, would have sufficed, but his weary mind was barren and dulled. He could think of nothing, and desperation mounted almost to fury inside him as he remembered how limited was his time.

The answer—the way to prove himself—was there somewhere. It had to be. Still he paced and still he thought, until his mind and body were numb and heavy with fatigue. And still the solution eluded him.

"The generator!" he muttered savagely. "If only I hadn't given the natives that generator!"

And then he stiffened. His triumphant cry a moment later awakened Arvin in the adjoining cabin.

"Got it!" he shouted. "I've got it at last!"

In the morning, Lanning and Arvin went to Loran. Reah-nor met them at the gate.

"You asked for proof of my identity," Lanning told the youth. "I have come here with that proof." And gently he explained.

When he finished, Reah-nor smiled. "It is so. I myself have seen it. You are proven, then, and the sacred metal is yours—in any amount and whenever you want it." Reah-nor turned, shouting at the crowd which had gathered behind him. "Make way!" he commanded. "Make way for Lan-ning!"

THE gray nothingness of hyperspace closed once more about the *Valiant*. The great war cruiser was returning home.

Lanning stood before the telescreen in the control room. It showed nothing now, but in memory he still saw the white towers of Loran and the rolling green fields of Saoh. And the light in Arvin's eyes told plainly that he saw, too.

Dunlop stepped down from the navigator's platform and approached Lanning. "Well, it won't be long now until we're back on Earth. You know, I didn't think the ship would be able to take off, what with all that cosmium stored in the hold."

The commander's friendly grin was replaced by a puzzled frown. "You've explained how you proved your identity, Lanning, but it still seems rather incredible to me."

"Not at all," Lanning said with an answering smile. "You see, in trying to find a way to assure the natives beyond all doubt that I was Lan-ning, I happened to think of the atomic generator I had left behind. I remembered that the generator was built by Triplanetary, Inc.—and who does not know the trademark of that famous concern? Three worlds enclosed within a triangle. This trademark, of course, was stamped prominently upon the generator housing.

"I simply explained the appearance of the trademark to Reah-nor and told him where he would find it. I hadn't seen the generator on the second visit to Saoh, and since only the original Lanning could have known about the trademark, my identity was established beyond question."

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Dunlop's grin appeared once more. "As simple as that—but it still seems like a miracle!" He sobered. "You know, Lanning, I almost hated to leave Saoh. The two weeks we spent there, loading the cosmium aboard, were a little like heaven to me. And there was a girl in Loran—"

Dunlop broke off abruptly. He hesitated, then placed a hand on Lanning's shoulder, his features wistful. "Lanning . . . I guess I'll have to apologize for something. I accused you and Arvin of being sentimental—but now I understand. . . ."

THE END

King of The Sea

★ **By Carter T. Wainwright** ★

POSEIDON, also called Neptune, is probably the most commonly referred to god of the ancient Greeks. Poseidon was a brother of Zeus and like him had the benign dignity and bearing that characterized the major gods. Poseidon possessed complete control of the seas and the oceans and was able to cause storms, hurricanes, typhoons and all manner of sea-tragedies in pursuit of his desires or for revenge upon faithless mortals.

Consequently, because of his power, it was the custom of sailors everywhere to propitiate him by offering a libation of wine which was poured symbolically into the sea. When his fury was aroused he caused tidal waves or inundations of the water front. This accounts for the fact that he was more worshipped by coastal peoples than by those who lived inland.

Poseidon traveled in a chariot made of a huge sea-shell, drawn by numerous sea-horses. Before the chariot, sea-monsters would play and gambol in honor of their acknowledged ruler before whom they bowed. While Poseidon owned as all the gods, a lavish palace on Mount Olympus, his favorite haunt was a beautiful palace at the bottom of the Aegean Sea.

As a rule Poseidon accepted the ominipotence of Zeus and often aided him in battle against recalcitrant gods or against some mortals, but there were times when the ruler of the sea chose to oppose the master of Olympus.

On one occasion Hera and he conspired to overthrow Zeus' rule. They were detected by Zeus. He beat Hera severely and condemned Poseidon to forego his rule of the sea for seven whole years during which time he was forced to build the walls of Troy.

Poseidon has also been considered a master of invention. At one time a contest was held between Poseidon and Pallas-Athene as to who could create the most useful object for subject man. Poseidon took his trident and struck the ground a mighty blow and from it there sprang out a horse, the full-blown animal, the like of which the Earth had never seen. Pallas-Athene hit the ground and out popped an olive tree. The judges awarded Pallas-Athene the title of creator of the most valuable, feeling that man would use the horse for war. Poseidon taught humans to master the animal and as it resulted the gods' original fears turned out to be true.

Poseidon was in love with a beautiful maiden called Scylla. But he was married to a sea-nymph named Amphitrite who became jealous, naturally, of Poseidon's new love. So, through magic incantations and the use of complex herbs, Amphitrite caused Scylla to be changed into a horrible monster having twelve feet, six heads and the voice of a dog. This new monster in rage then made a practice of swooping down on unsuspecting ships and biting up six men each time she appeared.

Poseidon's children were nothing to brag about —they were the Cyclops, those huge giants with a single eye in the center of their foreheads. These ominous creatures worked for Heaphestus the fire-god, and because they neither feared the gods, were holy terrors indeed. The Cyclops that was defeated by Odysseus, was also a son of Poseidon. Prior to his destruction by the Greek hero he had fallen in love with a nymph who rejected him because of his horrible appearance. In revenge the Cyclops killed the nymph's lover.

Many of the habits of modern sea-farers can be traced to the ancient worship of Poseidon or Neptune as the modern preference has it. Thus when crossing the equator today, it is common to have a mock-ceremony wherein Neptune is supposed to come out of the sea to be propitiated. Actually such ceremonies date back to ancient Grecian times when ships never took to sea without making some sort of offering to appease the sea-god.

The Romans honored Poseidon or Neptune exactly as did the Greeks. Whenever Roman naval commanders took their ships into battle the first thing they did was to sacrifice a black bull to Neptune's honor. Often a trident, the universal symbol of Neptune was carried in a small chamber aboard the vessels and prayed to whenever danger threatened.

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"*BLOW, wind, blow.*"

Nora crooned it softly. Her dark-auburn tresses cascaded down her slim, straight back in a silver-tinted waterfall. Her eyes crinkled in laughter as she looked up at me. My heart leaped upward as though it were striving to do what my throat wouldn't, tell her how lovely she looked, and how much I loved her. Then she turned and pointed a finger toward the horizon and the spell was broken.

"Look! A ship!"

I caught her free hand and she grasped my fingers lightly.

"So it is," I said somewhat inanely. I was still lost in her.

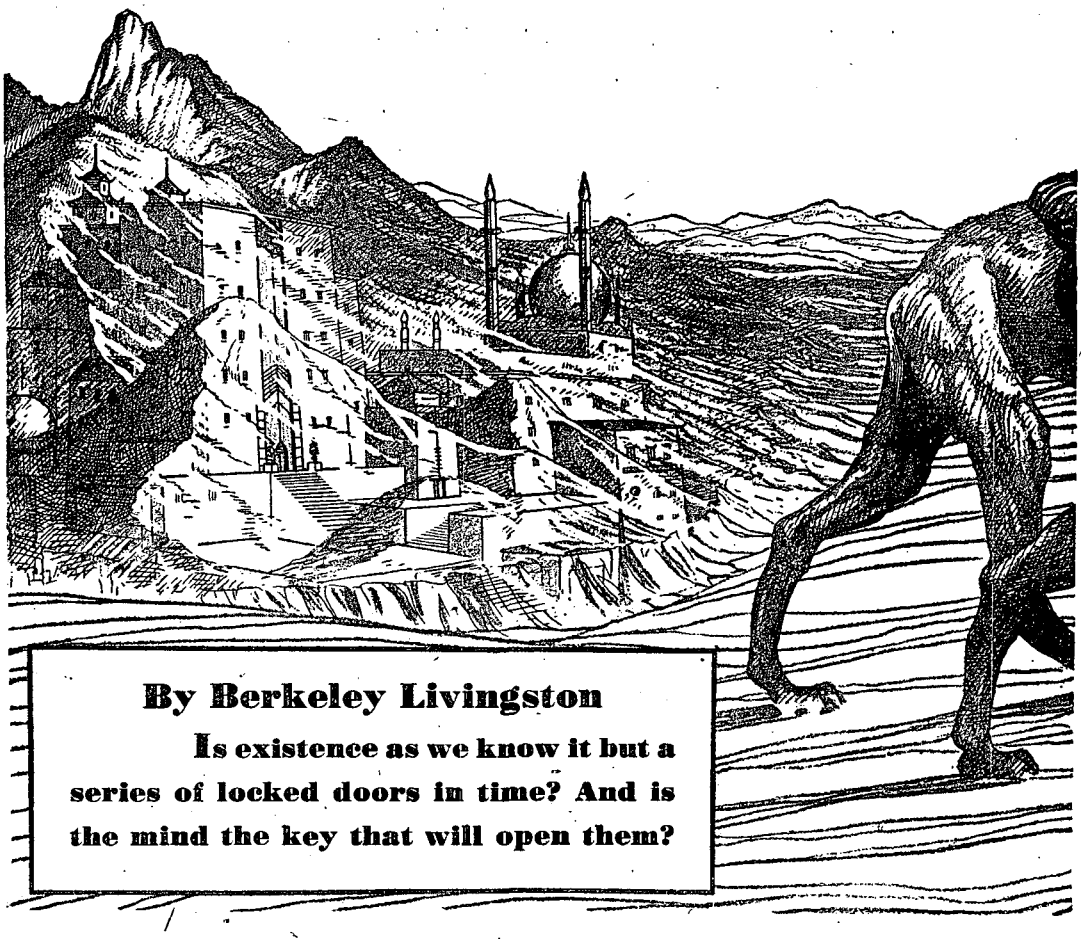
Her eyes narrowed as she strove to identify it. "What is it?" she asked. "Can't make it out."

"Just another lake freighter," I said. "Maybe wheat, or paper to one of the—"

"My! Aren't you the romantic one! Wheat or paper . . . tell me, how can anyone as practical as you write the kind of love-filled sophisticated plays that you do?" Her lips pursed in wonder. They looked as kissable that way as any other.

Before I could reply, she turned, loosed my grip and scurried across the sand, toward the bright rectangle of light that was a boundary of Nat Hyer's dune home. I leaped after her and caught her, half-way up the dune. She took my arm and we went in.

Hyer, a tall blond man with a vague wondering expression, spotted us first. He was carrying a tray of cocktails



By Berkeley Livingston

Is existence as we know it but a series of locked doors in time? And is the mind the key that will open them?

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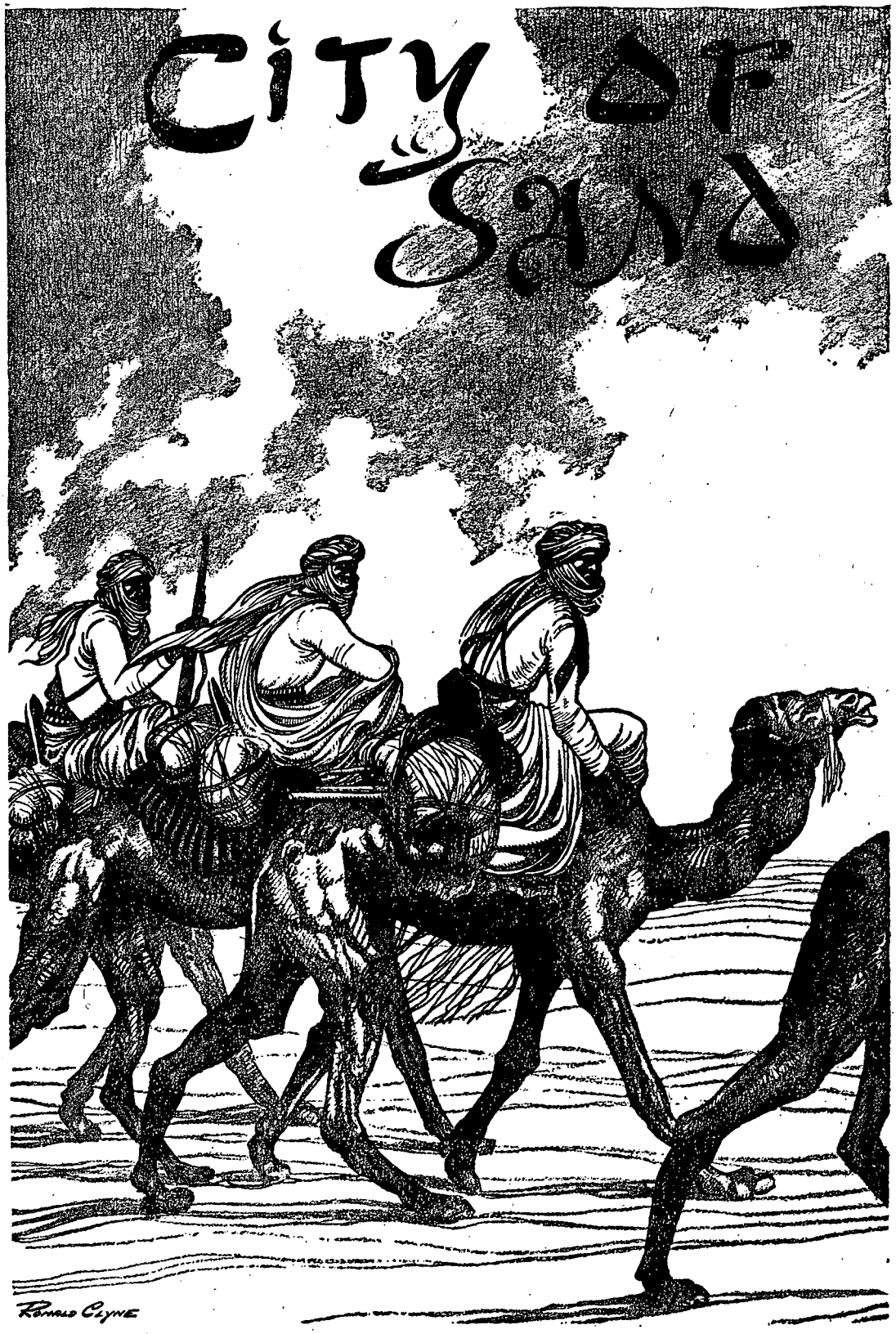
City of Sand



The city shimmered in a haze as the four camels and their riders moved swiftly away . . .

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from the kitchen to the large room which served as living room, studio and general hell-room for his amiable and odd collection of friends.

He grinned knowingly and said:

"Hah! How was he, Nora?"

Nora colored and bit her lips. Hyer could be a bit trying with his heavy attempts at humor. I said, "Miss Carson, I'll have you know, Hyer, is first, last and always, a business woman."

"Fine. Fine," he said, throwing the words at us over his shoulder as he continued with the tray. "That's the way I like 'em. All business . . ." he passed from view.

Nora went over to the mirror and did something to her hair. She looked at me with a speculative look and said:

"Queer duck, Hyer. Looks and acts like a low-class moron. Hard to believe he's one of our great painters."

"Just as hard to believe," I said, "that Nora Carson is an executive in one of our city's largest department stores. She looks . . . no, I won't say that she *acts* like a movie actress . . . that would be very unfair. But certainly, she doesn't fit for a picture of cold, business efficiency. So you see, looks are deceiving."

Her voice trilled in laughter.

"Okay, Don, you win. Let's go in and see what the rest are up to."

The room we entered echoed with loud laughter and small talk. One wall, the one facing Lake Michigan, was entirely of glass. The moon hung low, seemingly suspended a few yards above the water. It etched the blackness with silver light which reflected from the small waves. I heard the small gasp of delight Nora gave voice to and was glad that I had brought her.

PEOPLE lounged comfortably about in the highly modern, yet comfortable furniture which Hyer had designed expressly for his home. The bright words were bandied about from group to group, each snatching a word from out of the air, as if it was fish and they had cast for it.

". . . Shostakovitch. Marvelous! Heard his Ninth, yet?"

". . . My *dear!* Did you say Annabelle? Why that camera queen is out for anything. Especially if it wears pants."

". . . Hemingway? Unh, unh! The guy's lost his touch. He's a one book man . . . sure too much money. Can't make money and be a true artist."

Then Hyer's bellow from across the room:

"Don! Don Byrnes! Over here, Donnie boy."

I looked to the far corner from where the bellow emanated. He was sprawled out on several pillows before a low chair, in which was sitting the Lilliputian figure of that man with the great mind, Doctor Scoville. I murmured a, "don't be frightened, now," to Nora. Her lips twisted into a half-smile. And we went past the characters, sprawled about, to the two men awaiting us.

"Miss Carson . . . Doctor Scoville," I said.

He murmured a polite something and shook Nora's hand. I liked Scoville. He was a tiny man who liked to wear ill-fitting clothes. A small, pointed beard, neatly trimmed, hung from his lower lip. Rimless glasses, tinted blue, shaded hazel eyes that were sharp with appreciation of life's unending vagaries. He was a psychiatrist, but not the usual kind, who themselves were mental cases.

"We were talking about your play, Don," Hyer said. "Scoville thinks you did a hell of a good job on that woman."

"Thanks," I said. I liked that. I had been a little afraid of that particular character. Now that Scoville gave

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her tribute, I was more than pleased.

"Yes," Scoville said in his precise, slightly metallic voice, "I liked her very much. But more, I liked the manner in which you had her portray the part. An unusual case of schizophrenia. She lived in two worlds, didn't she? And both were real to her. So when the problems of one became too great, she left it for the sanctuary of the other."

"What the hell!" Hyer said. "Don't we all?"

Scoville turned his bright look in the other's direction.

"I suppose so," he said. "Imagination is a wondrous thing. It can make worlds, people them with the characters you want, make them do your bidding, in fact live your life as you wish. Nor do you have to even bother closing your eyes."

"But we always have to come back to the real one, don't we, Doctor?" Nora asked.

"If you don't," Scoville said, "you'll find yourself in a padded cell."

"Y'know," Hyer said after the laughter which Scoville's reply had brought on, subsided, "that'd make an interesting picture."

HIS face was screwed up in an expression which, for him, was supposed to denote thought, but only made him look more inane than usual. "Two panels: one, life as we live it; the other, life as we think we live it."

It was an interesting idea. And it gave me the germ of a plot for a story. Or a play.

I gave them the sketch of what had come to mind. Three acts, the first giving real life, the second the mental life and the third, back to real life—*but as a continuation of the mental one!*

"Can't be done!" Scoville said. "The world of the imagination is a separate entity from the one we live in. The two cannot be associated. Neither in time nor space."

I saw his point. But I still liked my idea.

Someone had turned the radio on and we heard the time-beat and the announcement. It was half-past twelve. People began arising from their seats and pillows. They converged on us, still chattering. Hyer rose cumbersomely to meet them. They had only come to say how much they regretted leaving.

Hyer had built, at his own expense, a gravel road which led to the house from the concrete highway, a mile in. Most of his guests had driven in. He saw them to the door, bellowing in his bull-voice, "Come again. Any time. Always in."

He turned as the last went out and came over to Nora and took her arm.

"Tired?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Come on, then. I'll show you your room."

She gave us a good night and followed Hyer.

"Nice girl," Scoville said. "Like her. Not the usual sort. Rather surprised to see her here."

"We-ll," I began in explanation. "She didn't want to come but I sort of talked her into it."

"Yes . . .?"

"Oh, hell! She intrigues me. Wonder what makes her tick? Here's how I met her. We usually get our settings from people who make a specialty of that sort of work. We needed a certain kind of drapery. And nobody had it. Somebody recommended a department store. So I went down to inquire. And met Miss Nora Carson. She is the merchandising manager. That was several weeks ago."

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"And . . .?"

I wished he wouldn't do that. It made me feel like I was on the witness stand. Hyer came back just then.

"A mighty nice hunk of stuff, Donny boy," he said. He smacked his lips loudly.

"Ah!" I spat out. "Why—you moronic lecher!"

He cackled loudly as I strode from the room. But as I reached the threshold, he said:

"And I think, though I wouldn't swear on it, that she sort of goes for our Donny boy."

I forgave him all, then.

CHAPTER II

"NORA."

I waited a second, then called again, "Nora."

There was a muffled series of sounds from behind the closed door and I heard her call, "Hello."

"It's me, Don. How's for a swim before breakfast?"

There was no answer. I waited. And the door swung open and she stood before me, robed, her feet encased in bright sandals and a rubberized helmet swinging from her hand.

"Let's go," she said.

We saw Jason, Hyer's Filipino boy, preparing breakfast but we didn't stop. The lake beckoned.

The sand gritted beneath our feet; it felt good. There was a light breeze which ruffled up small whitecaps. And the air had that early morning sharpness. I shed my robe and she followed suit. I was glad that Hyer was a late riser. Had he seen her in a bathing suit, we wouldn't have gone swimming. She had the sort of figure which artists demand be portrayed.

"Last one in's a stinkfish," she called, even as she started running.

"Cheater!" I yelped. And ran after.

Hyer had chosen his spot well. He had the best beach area on the dunes. A hundred yards to either side, headlands cut sharply into the water. They acted as breakwater. We found the water cold, and mildly wavy.

Nora turned and called:

"Race?"

"Sure. Where?"

She treaded water, almost erect, and pointed to something in the distance.

"That rowboat out there."

I nodded and swam even.

It was an even race till we hit the water past the headland. There the wind roughed the water up into heavy waves. My superior strength made it easier going for me. I pulled ahead. Then I turned to throw a taunt at her. And the words died on my lips. I whirled and raced to her.

A log, half-submerged, had come in on the crest of a wave, just as she brought her head down, and caught her a sharp blow. That was what I had seen when I turned. She was dazed and trying to float when I reached her. But the waves were smashing hard at her. I made it in time.

I put my arm under her head, and as I did so, saw that she had sustained a nasty cut just above the temple. Her eyes gave me a grateful look. And turned up in unconsciousness.

The waves lost their size. Instead, they became more choppy as I tried for the near shore line. It couldn't have been more than a few hundred yards off. But it seemed miles, before I dragged her still-unconscious figure up on the sand.

I GAVE her artificial aid. She dribbled some water from the side of mouth. Then I saw her eyelids flutter. And I knew she was all right.

She staggered erect. I put my arm

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around her waist and felt her tremble in my grasp. Her teeth chattered as she gasped:

"Silly, wasn't it, letting that driftwood sneak up on me?"

The cut on her head was still bleeding. I was afraid of shock. I looked around, trying to get my bearings. Then I saw the corner of a gabled roof peaking from between two dunes about fifty yards up from the beach.

"Up we go, baby," I said lifting her in the fireman's grip. She lay across my shoulders, limply.

Ever carry anything across sand? That house I had seen wasn't fifty yards off. It was fifty miles. Some time in the eternity which followed, I staggered up to the low, wide porch that ran entirely around it and let her slip from my shoulders. Not till then did I give the house more than a second glance.

It was of a design that, even for the Dunes, where all the homes are of mad design, was stranger than anything I'd ever seen. It wasn't a house. It was a sawed-off tube with a metal covering that I was looking at. Constructed entirely of glass brick, I could see nothing that even remotely resembled a door.

"I'm c-cold," Nora said. And the chattering of her teeth gave added emphasis to her words.

I had to get something warm into her. Get her into bed under warm blankets. I searched desperately for a break in the glass which would show where the door was. Certainly no one was mad enough to design a house without having an entrance.

And a section of the glass moved outward and a man appeared within the frame of darkness. Three long steps and he was at our side.

"Anything wrong?" he asked in solicitous tones.

Even as I answered, "Yes. We had an accident . . . swimming," I sized him up.

Tall, taller than I, about Hyer's build, he was heavier than my artist friend. And not so fat. Blond, he had a ruddy complexion. His eyes I couldn't see. The head was bent down.

"Better bring her in," he said.

I lifted her and followed him. I didn't pay much attention to the inside design of the house, except to note that we went *down* instead of straight forward as one would imagine. I followed him down a narrow winding incline and into a room which was a combination bedroom and study.

"Get her to bed," he said. "And I'll get some hot coffee."

I PILED all the blankets over Nora and tucked the ends in snugly. She didn't say anything. But in a few seconds the castanets stopped their chatter. Warmth began to flood her being. The door opened and the stranger appeared carrying a tray holding a pot of coffee and three cups. There was also sugar and cream in separate containers.

I lifted her head and poured the warm liquid into her mouth. She sipped it slowly and I felt her relax under the stimulating warmth of the coffee. When she finished that cup, I poured another. Not till then did I realize I could do with some myself.

I sat on the edge of the bed and sipped my drink and watched the color come back to her cheeks.

"I think she'll be all right," the stranger said. "Let her sleep."

It was a good suggestion. He motioned with his head for me to follow, as he left the room. I gave her a farewell pat on the cheek as I got up from the bed. The cut had dried but there was a bloody streak down the side of

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her face. I thought I'd better ask if he had some antiseptic and come back later and apply it when she was asleep.

He brought out a decanter and some glasses and poured us a drink. It was excellent whiskey and I sipped it gratefully. I looked around the oddly shaped room. He didn't follow the design of the exterior. I saw what he had done. The interior was divided into quarters. An opaque-glass door, set in the center of the room, swung on a center hinge and permitted entrance to the other rooms. But because one couldn't see through the glass, what the other rooms looked like was a mystery. We were in the living room.

"Haven't had a chance to thank you," I said.

"Don't mention it," he said.

He had a deep, resonant voice. It was in keeping with the rest of him. Yet, somehow, and for no reason that I could explain, I didn't like the man.

"Rather unusual place you have here. Funny, never noticed it before."

"We-ll," he drawled, "it's sort of out of the way. And the Dunes do hide it."

I looked through the exterior glass. The wind had died and the lake was a placid mirror. And I noticed something peculiar. We were looking *down* on the lake. Yet we hadn't come up.

"Oh!" I exclaimed. I remembered that I had intended to ask for the antiseptic. "Do you have some sulpha powder? Miss Carson got a bad cut from a log."

"It has already been taken care of," he reassured me.

I looked at him in surprise. He had been with me all the time. He smiled at my obvious bewilderment.

"I had my woman come in after we left. She saw to it that the cut on her head was taken care of. I think she's still with her." He sipped from the long-stemmed glass and continued, "By the way, let me introduce myself. My name's Sutan."

I GAVE mine and Nora's. Silence hung a wall between us for a few moments. Then he said:

"Look. Why don't you and Miss Carson stay the rest of the afternoon?"

I detected a note of pleading in his voice.

"We-ll," I hedged. "I wouldn't mind. Except that the people with whom we're staying might get worried." Then I got a bright idea. "Say! Why don't you come back with us? I'm sure you'll like Hyer. Y'know, the artist. He has another friend who's staying the week-end, Doctor Scoville. I'm sure you'll have an excellent evening."

I think that decided him. For he said, reflectively, "Scoville? The mind man?"

It was an odd way of putting it. Still I guess one can think of Scoville's profession that way.

"Yes," I answered. "Know him?"

"No. But I've read his articles in the Journal. I'd very much like to meet him."

"Then come along."

Instead of agreeing, as I thought he would, he said:

"I've a better idea. Stay until Miss Carson's rested. It won't be long. Then I'll let you use my boat to get back with and if you don't mind, extend my invitation to your friends to have dinner with me. I think I've something to show Scoville that would interest him."

My face must have showed some indecision. He went on:

"Believe me, I would very much like to go with you, but I find it impossible right now."

I smiled and said:

"Oh, hell! Hyer's fat and lazy and

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hates to get out of that ice-cream cone house of his. It'll do him good to get out. And I'm sure Scoville won't mind."

"Good," he said, answering my smile, and arising. "Let's see how the young lady is, shall we?"

She was sitting in bed, an expression of wonder on her face. Music filled the room. Music, the likes of which I'd never heard before. I looked around but couldn't see the source.

"I can't find it either," she complained.

Sutan laughed aloud.

"I had Lora turn on some records," he explained. "Each room has a hidden speaker and I pipe the music in from my music room."

"Simple as all that," I said. "Which reminds me. That glass brick. How come I could see out of it and not into it?"

"Oh," he said lightly. "Something I invented. I have to admit to a liking for privacy."

"I'm afraid I'd have guests all the time, if I had a place like this," Nora said.

I looked closely at her while she was speaking. I couldn't even see where the cut had been. It was either completely healed or Sutan's servant had placed a flesh-colored piece of adhesive on it. And the rest had done her wonders. When I asked if she was ready, she nodded and hopped out of bed on the instant.

"Thank you very much, Mister Sutan," she said, turning on the bright charm of her brilliant smile.

I saw Sutan's eyes go dark in some inner excitement. I understood how she affected him. Because she affected me the same way.

"I'll walk with you, if you don't mind?" he said.

I did mind. But what the hell could I say?

SUTAN had built a jetty out into the lake and I saw a small power cruiser tied to it. I hadn't noticed it when I was swimming in but then I guess I wasn't paying much attention to the beach except that part where we wound up at. There was a man in the boat. I could only see the upper part of his body until we stepped down into it. Then I only guessed at the rest of him. He must have been a giant, from what I saw of the lower part of him. Nora and I made ourselves comfortable on the leather-backed settee. The pilot fiddled with the instruments on the panel and the cruiser moved slowly and smoothly out into the water.

Sutan waved good-bye and called:

"Make it for dinner: around seven."

I shook my head in agreement.

The pilot turned his head to look back and I saw his face for the first time. He had a great, beaked nose, slit-mouth, black eyes narrow-set and mean. He was certainly a villainous looking character. And he had skin that was almost black, so dark was it. But after that first questioning look toward Sutan, he never so much as gave us a second glance.

"Feel okay?" I asked.

"Sure," she said. "Lora came in after you and Sutan left and gave me some sort of concoction to drink. Tasted bitter and had the color of wet almonds. But immediately after I drank it all my tiredness left me. Wonderful stuff, whatever it was. Then she washed the blood from my cheek and daubed something on. Now I feel like a new person."

I said, "That's swell. Guess we're home."

The motor had died and we were drifting into shore. We peered to the line of sand and saw that Hyer and Scoville were on the shore. The boat rode in until it could go no further and

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I lifted Nora out and carried her ashore.

They drowned us in questions.

". . . What happened?"

" . . . Who was that character?"

". . . Where've you been?"

I said, "Wait a minute. Let's get back to the house and I'll answer any and all questions."

"So the estimable Sutan desires us for dinner tonight," Hyer said, when I finished relating our adventure. Nora had gone to her room to change and Hyer, Scoville and I sat in Hyer's studio with our hands wrapped around cold and foaming glasses of beer.

"You'll like it, I mean the house," I said.

Hyer spread his hands wide in mute acceptance of the fact that he was going to have to get off his fat haunch. Scoville smiled thinly but also said nothing. Then Nora came in and we spent the rest of the afternoon playing backgammon.

CHAPTER III

IT WAS still light when the four of us walked down the last dune before Sutan's hidden home. Nora had put on something resembling a sarong. Only she called it an evening dress. The rest of us were decked out in the usual sport clothes which were a trade mark in the dunes.

There was no light on the porch. But we could see a glimmer of illumination through the opaque glass. Hyer's eyes were narrowed in speculative interest as we came onto the porch.

"Like to meet the architect who designed this place," he murmured.

We waited for a few seconds. And once again, with that same startling suddenness which had so surprised me before, there was that dark opening and Sutan came out onto the porch. He was dressed in whites and he made a rather handsome appearance. I had an idea that he had dressed for Nora.

I made the introductions, hands were shaken all around and we went in. Hyer behind me whistled as we went through the business of following Sutan in his winding course. We came into a room I hadn't seen before. Like the others, it was shaped like a wedge. There was a long semi-circular bench of some light natural wood placed before the low settee which was to be our dinner table.

Then the dark-skinned pilot of the boat came in bearing an immense tray of food. It was the first time I saw him erect. He was one of the biggest men I'd ever seen. The food was foreign in flavor and quality but the most delicious I'd ever eaten. I saw that the others appreciated it as much as I did. I was seated next to Sutan on one side—on the other he had made sure to seat Nora—and with the serving of coffee, the servant bent over Sutan who said something to him in a language I didn't understand. The servant left the room and we made ourselves comfortable with cigarettes and cigars.

Soon the strains of music filled the air. It was more of what we'd heard earlier that afternoon. I recognized the underlying motif, a sort of minor strain. Nora and I exchanged amused looks at the expressions on Hyer's and the Doctor's faces.

"You've got terrific design ideas here, fella," Hyer said. "Is that your trade, industrial design?"

"No, I have no trade or profession," Sutan said. "Being wealthy enough, I merely have hobbies."

"Well, if you ever lose some of that wealth, you can get more just by showing off this place."

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"It's an idea," Sutan said. Then to Scoville, "By the way, Doctor, I read your latest in the Journal and although I couldn't agree with you, still I found it interesting."

Scoville's eyebrows shot skyward.

"You mean the article about 'Mirages of the Mind'?"

"Yes."

"What is there in the article that makes for disagreement?"

"Well, for example, you say in one part of the article that the struggle for existence being what it is, unfair, makes for sub-conscious desire to escape. But that is impossible. I'm quoting you. Then later, you say that imaginative escape only leads to a mental condition because inevitably we must come back to the reality of our everyday world."

"And you disagree?" Scoville said.

"Right! And I think I can prove it."

SCOVILLE laughed. I saw Sutan's face go red in anger. And for the first time saw the color of his eyes. They were amber in color. And in anger they turned almost tobacco brown.

"Now just a minute," Hyer broke in. "Do you mean by that, that we only have to imagine a community or land and we will find ourselves in it?"

"Something like that," Sutan said.

"Ridiculous!" Scoville snapped.

"I said I can prove it. Who among you has the greatest imagination?"

"Hyer," I said.

"Byrnes," Hyer said, passing the buck neatly back to me. "He's one of our leading dramatists."

"Good! Then we'll use him as our medium. Unless he's afraid to . . ."

"I'll do it."

He led us from the room and once again we were traversing the narrow inner corridor. We came to a division in it and moved one by one down the narrower corridor that the wall of the division made for us. Around and around. We walked for a full five minutes. And at the end, came to a door which Sutan opened with a key.

I didn't know what to expect. I don't think anyone of us had any thoughts on where or to what we were being led. But certainly it wasn't what we were ushered into. It reminded me of a set Banin had designed for a revival of Frankenstein.

A circular well of a room, the ceiling thirty feet above the floor, half the wall bearing massive switches, coils, intricately wired attachments, the nature of which was a mystery. And the usual settee all around the wall.

"Looks like a setting for Inner Sanctum," Hyer remarked.

I thought I had been the last to follow Sutan, but I saw he was waiting for someone else. When I turned my head I saw that his two servants were also to be included in the experiment.

We stood in the glare of hidden lights and waited for the show to begin. I think that's how we all felt about it. Sutan, as master of ceremonies, took the center of the floor and said:

"All right, everybody. Listen closely to what I tell you and do *exactly as I say!* Byrnes will imagine a scene and will describe it aloud. You will, each of you, repeat the scene as he describes it. In a matter of a few seconds, you will feel vertigo. Don't get panicky. Leave the head set alone, understand, leave the head set alone!"

"Just a moment," Scoville said.

We looked to him in wonder. There was something odd in his voice.

"If you think to hypnotize Byrnes, it won't work. Because I will be able to circumvent that."

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"Doctor Scoville!" Sutan said in the tone one uses to chide a statement of a silly child. "Please! Do you take me for a charlatan?"

"I don't take you for anything, sir. Only don't attempt to take us."

Sutan made a half-bow in the Doctor's direction. Then he went to the wall and removed what seemed to be several head sets. The kind used by telephone operators. Motioning us to the settee, he told us to make ourselves comfortable. Then he attached the sets across the tops of our heads. I was tempted to say, "number please." There were two tiny coils which he placed into our ears. Wires, to which the coils were attached, ended in plugs which he plugged into sockets in the wall. Each of us had a set of these imitation hearing aids. The last set he placed over his own skull.

"Now, Byrnes, close your eyes and imagine a scene. Any kind. Give us some sort of description of that scene. If there are people to be seen, describe them, what they are wearing, what they are doing."

I closed my eyes. I felt silly. It was such a damn silly business. Describe a scene! What? My mind was as empty . . as . . . I felt a slight dizziness. A vaporous cloud hung before my brain. Like milky mucus, it was a curtain which I had to get through. Then it was torn apart as by a strong wind. And I saw what lay beyond.

A city was revealed to me. And as I saw it, I told what I was seeing. I didn't see all of it because it was on a plane above me. But I could see the minareted buildings stretching their spires to the sky. To my left was a vast area of water. Clouds hung, painted to the blue-white sky. Ahead of me, smooth yellow sand rolled in gentle waves both to the shore of the sea and to where the line of the city began. I was standing on the shore a few yards from where the water came up. A sand piper ran by on his thin stilts of legs.

And from behind a nearby dune, four riders, mounted on snow-white camels, rode into view.

CHAPTER IV

I OPENED my eyes and stared about me with bewilderment. I was alone. On a sandy beach. Ahead of me there was the blue lake. And to my right, on a sort of plateau, a city, strange to my eyes and senses seemed to hang suspended in the misty air. There was something vaguely familiar, yet somehow strange about the scene. As if it lacked something. And four men rode around the shoulder of a nearby dune. Instinctively, I lowered my head and moved in a direction which would take me from their path.

It was not to be.

"Ho, old one!" one of them called.

I burrowed further into the head covering and kept on with my seemingly aimless walk. The stinking bulk of a camel intruded on my path. A sandaled foot booted my side.

"Are you deaf?" the same voice demanded.

I looked up, blinking my eyes and wiping at my nose with a dirty rag which I took from my burnoose. They were evil-looking men and they carried evil-looking weapons, curved swords which gleamed bright threats in the noonday sun.

"No!" I answered in a tired voice. "I am not deaf. What does a mighty warrior want with old Atab?"

His full-lipped mouth curved in disgust as I exhaled noisily, the water from my nose dripping to my chin.

"Bah!" another said. "The old one

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is half-blind. Doan could have passed his scabrous body at arm's length and he wouldn't have seen him."

The first one said, "Well, Sutan has ordered us to question everyone we see. He couldn't have gone far if the jailer was right. Doan is a mighty warrior but . . ."

"Save it Komar, save it," the second broke in. "Your throat is never parched for words. Let us be on our way."

They rode on nor did I turn my head to follow them. Ahead, Shalmar, the City of Light, the city of Sutan the Cruel, sent lances of golden light toward me. I was an old filth-encrusted fisherman, dressed in the worn rags of his tribe. I was Doan, who had that very morning strangled one of my jailers and had escaped the torture chamber of Sutan.

But in that jail were two of my dearest friends, Jemet Har and Jemet Scoll. And in the well-guarded, golden-domed palace of Sutan was No-Rah, Scoll's daughter. Sutan did well to send warriors hunting for me. I laughed to myself. The people hated Sutan. It didn't take me long to find sanctuary. The fishing village nearby had furnished friends who had given me the clothing I desired. Now I could go back to Shalmar and none would be the wiser.

The sun was high. A fishing boat tacked lazily in the wind. And the first person I met was a beggar sitting cross-legged on the sand. He blessed me on the name of the All-High and held out his palm for alms.

I tossed him a gold piece and I saw his talon-fingers caress it before it disappeared into the folds of his rags.

"Tell me, holy one," I whined. "Where can I find the place of Sabu, the camel herder?"

"Thou seekest peace?"

"Aye," I completed the ritual. "Peace and death."

"At the far edge of the market place. There is a one-legged beggar at the entrance. Say what you want of him."

The far edge of the market place. That meant I had to traverse the whole width of the city before I reached my destination. I moved on.

I DID not know the city too well. But I knew that I could reach the market place by going down the narrow, winding streets which skirted the great wall bounding that side of the city.

Even during this part of the day, there was dreariness to be felt and a squalor to be seen in the section of Shalmar I moved through. Narrow houses, six and seven stories high, leaned in crookedly shameful manner over the cobblestone-streets. Camel and horse dung was to be found with every step. And with the animal smell, there was the keener, more horrible smell of human uncleanliness.

It was a street of merchants and wine shops through which I walked. Their awnings, brightly striped even through the dirt, made a colorful canopy. I moved warily. For I wasn't armed. And there were drunken brigands and the scum that Sutan labeled warriors, to be found here.

The All-High was with me. I met no one. And no one thought it sport to quarrel with one as miserable-looking as I.

The market place was aglitter with color. The merchants hawked their wares in strident voices which carried to the farthest corners of the market. For the first time I walked with ease. I even straightened from the stoop I used to lend me age. I searched with eyes that were keen for the one-legged beggar. And found him.

He was a scrawny man bare of

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clothes except for a breech-clout and bare of hair except for a top-knot. But he had one leg and he was sitting before the entrance to as dismal a hole as I'd ever seen.

"Alms! Alms!"

The cry immemorial. I tossed the coin into his palm.

"The All-High smiles upon thee," he said, showing all the blackened stumps of his teeth.

"I seek peace, holy one," I said.

"And with it . . . " he intoned.

"Death," I answered.

"Sabu will welcome you," he said.

Another coin found his waiting palm and I entered the dreary hole. I stood upon the topmost of the three steps to Sabu's caravansary and tried to see into the ill-lit gloom. A commingling of odors so foul I choked, held me breathless. These people, I thought, know no other use of water except to drink.

The entrance belied the size of the cavern. It was almost a full circle, about a hundred feet in diameter. And filled to bursting with as villainous a group of men as ever I'd seen. They lay sprawled on the dirt floor, sat on rough stools beside long, wooden benches, sat propped against the stone walls. And over all there was the shouting voices . . . and the smell.

There was a sound behind me and someone shoved at my shoulders and I flew down the steps to land sprawling on my belly. A great burst of laughter roared out at the sight. I picked myself up and amidst the cat-calls and jeers of those who had seen my fall, I made my way to a vacant bench.

A waiter, carrying a huge earthen flagon, paused for a moment by my table. His beady eyes looked closely at me.

"Sabu!" I said. "Call him here."

"Ho! Sabu!" his wine-hoarsened voice shouted. "A beggar wants audience."

He was as wide as he was tall, was Sabu. A huge unkempt beard masked the lower part of his face. Something had flattened his nose until it was almost level with his cheekbone. To top it off he was bald.

"So," he wheezed in a thick voice. "What do you want?"

"Peace."

"And with it . . ."

"Death."

"Riddles!" he bellowed hoarsely. "Take that!"

He swung a palm as thick as a ham against the side of my face, knocking me from the bench. Then he half-lifted me erect and booted me as hard as he could. I threw up my hands to save me from striking the wall . . . and shot between several skins hanging across an opening. I fell flat onto my belly again. And heard once more the delighted shrieks of laughter at what had happened.

Anger burned a hole in my breast. I arose with a snarl and turned to face the man who came through into the room. It was Sabu. And he had his hand up before his thick lips in a gesture demanding silence. My anger fled. His hand waved me back and I turned and found the couch he pointed out.

He half-turned, so that his voice was directed toward the opening and shouted, "Damned drunk! Take that!" And struck his clenched fist against an open palm. It made a satisfying noise. Then he whispered, "Wait. I'll be back."

CHAPTER V

"SO YOU are Doan," Sabu said.

He sat at my side on the low couch. I had waited for a little time

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before he had returned. And when he did there was a large grin on his features. I gathered his little stratagem had gone over. Now we sat and regarded each other with interest.

"Your father was taller, thicker," he went on, "like the forest giants he loved so well in the hills of his domain. But you, you are more like the desert sapling, slender, with a hidden strength that nothing will break."

It was a long speech. And I think, for him, not the usual way he talked. But I felt my face burn in pleasure at the sincere words.

"And you've come to Sabu because you're in trouble," he continued. "Rightly, too. Who else can find a cutthroat to do your bidding? Or a thief? Or an honest man?"

"I talk rebellion," I said softly.

He shrugged thick shoulders. "It has happened before," he said. "Now, from the beginning. And don't worry about interruptions. Sutan's spies have left."

"You know, don't you, that Sutan had my father assassinated?"

His eyes went wide at my words.

"No!" he breathed gustily. And again, "No!"

"By the All-High!" I swore. "I was visiting Jemet Har. I came back, almost to stick my head in the noose Sutan had prepared for me. If it hadn't been for some friends, my carcass would be rotting on the topmost hill. But they warned me in time. I returned to the Jemet and told him what had taken place. He made a vow to have Sutan's head for it.

"We were in heat. Our brains were petrified from anger. Sutan cannot be attacked willy-nilly. We should have known that his spies are everywhere and that from our first move, he knew what we had planned. Of course we were trapped. I got away."

He waited for me to go on. Then, when I remained silent, he said:

"Now you want me to help you get Jemet Har out of prison."

It was a shrewd guess. But not quite shrewd enough, for he did not know about Jemet Scoll and No-rah.

"I want two things," I said. "First, to get Jemet Har . . . and Jemet Scoll out of prison. And to get No-rah, Scoll's daughter, from out of the golden palace of Sutan."

Sabu whistled softly. I understood why. I was asking for the impossible. He tapped with thick fingers on his knee cap. Then he turned and yelled, "Jansu!"

The man who had started to wait on me appeared in the doorway.

"Yes?" he said.

"Get one-eyed Coba and his brother in here," Sabu said.

He went back to his tapping and whistling. In a few moments, two men walked into the room. One was tall, the other short. Yet there was something about them which told me they were brothers. I don't know what unless in the way their eyes looked with the same degree of shiftiness at us.

"I have work for you two," Sabu snapped.

They waited, silent, for what Sabu wanted. He turned to me and said:

"Tell them where your friends are located in the jail."

"The topmost tier," I said. "Three cells down from the door."

"Bring them here," Sabu said.

And with that, they turned and left. They hadn't said a single word.

"Is that all there is to it?" I asked in wonder.

"Yes. There isn't a door this side of heaven or hell those two can't get into or out of. Your friends will be here some time tonight. About this girl, however; that will require some-

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thing more than a getting into of doors. Sutan has at least a thousand men guarding that fantastic palace of his."

I LET him mull over the situation for a while. He added something new to the whistling and tapping routine, combing his beard with his fingers.

"By the way," he said slowly, "what of this girl and her father? I thought he had always been a friend of Sutan's."

"He wasn't a friend of Sutan's," I said. "He had been a friend of his *father's*. There is a vast difference in their manner of rule. Scoll found it out to his sorrow. Sutan invited him to his court for some reason or other. And of course Scoll accepted the invitation. And brought his daughter. Sutan, well, he wants No-rah."

Sabu detected the difficulty I had pronouncing her name.

"Ah, yes. Women and jewels. They have always been his weakness. *Weakness* . . . that's it! Jewels! Of the two, he prefers the glittering diamond, the blood-red glow of the ruby, the sparkle of an emerald to the curves of the most beautiful woman. And that, my boy, is how we get in. *Jansu!*"

Like a jinni, Jansu appeared again.

I didn't hear what Sabu told him, since he moved off the couch and talked to the servant in the doorway. Then he returned to me. There was a broad smile on his face.

"Doan, my boy. Sutan is going to be the most surprised man in all Abia, tomorrow. For tomorrow, the caravan of Busa the Magnificent comes to pay a visit to Shalmar. And Busa brings with him the gift of the fabulous Heaven Born diamond."

Perhaps the excitement of the past few days had addled my brain. I thought he had gone mad. *Heaven Born diamond! . . . caravan of Basu the Magnificent!* He roared with sudden laughter at my startled look

"No, my friend," he said, shrewdly guessing at my concern. "I am not mad. I have just set into motion the machinery that will gain us entrance to Sutan's harem-house."

Of course. Sutan's love of jewels was as well known as his love of women. Sabu had hit on the very thing bound to succeed. But how was he to manage it? What was this jewel he spoke of? After all, he was only a camel herder. And although I admitted to the fact that he had unusual friends, I couldn't see how he was to obtain . . .

"The trouble with Sutan," Sabu said by way of explaining how he planned to fool Sutan, "is that he is *very clever*. And like all very clever men, he finds no point in being clever for cleverness' sake. He must show off his smartness. He must prove to someone besides himself that he is the most clever of men. So he had to drag Har and you behind a couple of camels through all the streets of Shalmar, both to show what happens to traitors and to prove that they are always caught.

"So it was that I saw you. And recognized you."

I looked my surprise. He had recognized me. I didn't understand how. I was sure I had never seen him, although I had heard my father mention him several times. He didn't explain how he recognized me but went on:

". . . And immediately arranged for your escape. Only you beat my men to it. Luckily they got to you and told you where to go. The rest you know."

And I had thought him the sort who did not go in for long spiels. He looked up at me with bright interest as I burst into sudden laughter. Sabu was as

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windy as the Sirrocco which blew in the spring.

"It's nothing," I said. "Just a stray thought."

"Well, you must be weary, not alone with what you've been through. But also from having to listen to me. It will be a while before your friends arrive. Rest."

Sleep became the most desirable of things. And I slept.

"Like a baby," the words broke through my subconscious.

THE next I knew, I was flying through the air. Not far. Only from the couch to the earthen floor. And a voice hoarse with laughter, roared, "like a baby!"

It was Har. And behind him, Scoll. Har lifted me and we embraced. He felt me, his eyes gleaming in great good humor. Satisfied, I guess, that I was all in one piece, he moved back and regarded me with a suddenly malevolent look.

"So!" he began darkly. "Sutan is a fool. We will organize a revolt. The people are ready for it. Bah! We are the ones who were fools. And if it weren't for your friend, Sabu, here, Scoll and I would be hanging, by the thread Sutan makes his executioner place around the heads he chops."

I hung my head in simulated shame. And on second thought it wasn't so simulated. My foolhardiness had almost cost us our lives.

"A savage! Do you hear me? A savage! That's what Sutan is. And that beast, he has my daughter."

We had forgotten Scoll in the excitement of our meeting. We turned to him, as he voiced his bitterness.

"Don't worry," I said. "Sabu has promised that he will get her out."

"Sabu," Scoll went on, "is another savage."

"But a friendly one," Har pointed out.

"Can't be trusted. All alike. Soon as my daughter is freed, we're going back to Kompur. At least I will find peace there."

"Well," Sabu's hoarse shout greeted us from the curtained doorway. "So we are all here. Good! Sit friends. Sit. In a few moments, I will have Jansu bring our horses. And we will be off. In the meantime, I'll outline what I have in mind. Any suggestions will be taken in the same spirit in which they're offered."

I sighed in resignation. Nothing could stop Sabu, once he got his head.

"All the arrangements have been made. They wait our arrival. I trust you are well-rested. For we have a long ride ahead. And another to return. But that is for the morrow. Now, I give you this. You are now members of the entourage of Basu the Magnificent. Har, you are the personal bailiff. Doan, the custodian of the jewel. Scoll, h'm, Scoll will be my physician."

Har's mouth hung agape at the flow of words.

"Bailiff? Custodian? Physician?" he croaked. "What have we here? A madhouse? This hovel, this stinking hole! Are we to believe it is a palace?"

"A savage!" Scoll had a single mind. "And a mad one to boot."

"Wait. Wait," I cautioned. "Sabu has more than just words. Remember how you were freed. I have an idea—don't ask me how I got it—but I think he is more than he looks."

Sabu grinned in delight at all this, his broad nose gleaming dully with sweat in the light from the oil lamps. Har turned a fierce look to his rescuer.

"Don't think to play us false," he said in warning.

Sabu only laughed. He turned and

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called, "Jansu!"

The waiter-messenger appeared in the doorway.

"Yes?"

"Food for our guests."

Scoll and Har ate as if they were animals. Nor did I worry too much of etiquette as I dipped my fingers into the savory stew which Jansu brought.

"And now," Sabu said when we had done with the food, "we will be on our way."

I started for the curtained entrance and Sabu turned me aside. Still holding me by an arm, he made for the rear of the room. Pushing aside the couch on which I had been reclining, he pressed at a section of the wall and it slid around on a well-oiled pivot. The moon revealed several horses tethered to a bush.

CHAPTER VI

DAYBREAK found us in the wilderness. Ahead lay the foothills of the Avvas mountains. In all the long ride there had not been the slightest sign of pursuit. I could not reconcile that fact with what I knew of Sutan. I knew he would turn heaven and earth to find us. But we had neither seen nor heard anything. Sabu rode as unconcerned as if it were an outing we were on. All through the night he had entertained us with snatches of folksongs, extolling the virtues of his tribe. Har had softened in his attitude toward him. And had even joined him in his singing. Even I, who had the voice of a cock, had found the mood infectious. Only Scoll, bitter and malice-filled, kept still.

The horses were tired but we had not ridden hard and they were only breathing heavy. They were of the hardy desert kind that run till they drop. I would have admired the scenery of the land more if the situation weren't so fraught with peril for us. Too, my thoughts were on the deception Sabu intended to play. I wondered how he planned to enter Shalmar.

Then we entered the foothills and a world as silent as sleep. The moss and leaves covered our movements. And we rode beneath a panoply of trees whose branches interlocked above our heads. It was an eerie ride. Sabu reined his mount to the fore. And Jansu, who had also come along, acted as a rear guard. We rode single file, winding through the tangled growth that had the barest of openings for the horses. And of a sudden we were in the open, in a glade which wasn't more than a few yards across. Rather it was more of a circular valley between two high and rocky hills.

Sabu whirled his horse about and waited until we had all entered. Then he turned in the saddle and shouted:

"Ho! Ho, Assam. Open!"

My mouth hung open in astonishment. It was perfectly obvious that we were alone. To whom was this shout addressed? The hills echoed the cry. There was no other sound. And I felt my hair lift at the back of my head. For before my very eyes a whole section of one of the hills opened to reveal the dark caverness interior. And from within three men rode forth.

Sabu rode forward to meet them, we close behind. When they saw and recognized the squat shape and bald, gleaming skull, looks of joy lighted their fierce faces. Never had I seen such villainous men as these.

They set their heels into the horses' sides and spurred forward to meet us, shouting as they came. And when they were a few yards from us, their curved swords came swiftly from the scabbards. Screaming an unintelligible

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something, they rode down on us as if they intended to have our blood. The swords described circles of bright light above their heads. And as they passed us to either side they made harmless, although narrowly-missing swipes at us. Then they rode back and reined their mounts to a skidding, dust-enclosed halt in front of Sabu.

One of them rode alongside and leaning forward in the saddle, embraced Sabu.

"So thou hast arrived, eh, brother?"

"Aye," Sabu said. "Is everything in readiness?"

"All. The camels. And the jewel. And of course, the merchants."

Sabu's hands went wide. "Then what are we waiting for?" he asked.

"Are these the ones who are to join us?" the other asked.

"Aye."

"A bantam, an old hen and," he looked at Har, "a fat rooster."

"Peace, Jaon," Sabu said in warning. "They are friends."

"Then enter friends," Jaon cried in joyous tones. And turning, set his heels into the horse's belly sending him galloping toward the dark hole through which they'd just come.

WE FOLLOWED at a gallop, not knowing or caring where we were being led. Knowing only that we were among friends and that wherever their camp was, it was safety. We were not prepared for what we saw on entering the hill.

It wasn't a hill to begin with. Because we had been at a lower level, we didn't see that the hill was only an immense earthwork, a hundred or so feet high. A shell of dirt perhaps twenty feet thick. And beyond was a green, fertile valley, shallow as a saucer and almost as round. And grazing on the slopes were sheep and goats and horses. In the distance I saw the unmistakable shapes of many camels. And in the exact center of this valley was an immense encampment of tents, hundreds of them.

Our entry was the signal for an exodus of humanity from the tented grounds. Men, women, children, mounted and afoot, came to greet us, shouting and laughing as they came. And as they surrounded us by the hundreds, they called cheerful greetings to Sabu. He answered them in kind, leaning from his horse now and then to pat the cheeks of a child, or stroke the dark hair of a young maid or pat the shoulder of the stalwart young men who trotted alongside of his horse. Sabu was their chief; and I saw that he was beloved by all.

My doubts began to fade under the influence of our welcome.

We arrived before the largest and gaudiest tent, where we dismounted. Sabu tossed the reins to Jansu, who led his and our horses away.

"My hidden kingdom," Sabu said. I detected the pride in his voice. I couldn't blame him.

Jaon and the other two had also ridden up to the tent with us. And when Sabu invited us in, they followed. There were many pillows lying strewn on the hard packed earth. We made ourselves at ease. Jansu entered, followed by several women who bore on their heads dishes that were fragrant with spice. We ate as if we were famished.

Sabu came to business immediately following our repast.

"Jaon, you sent out the emissary?"

"Yes."

"Good. He will arrive sometime tonight. And by the morrow, our caravan will be at the gates."

"I also have the camels that we will need," Jaon said. "And the horses."

"Jansu," Sabu said, "now go and call

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old Makim to my tent."

"Ah!" Jaon exclaimed. "Disguises! Let me see if I can guess who will be who."

He looked closely at each of us. Then pointing a finger at each in turn, he said:

"The young one is the custodian, the old one the physician, and the fat one the bailiff. Right?"

Sabu applauded loudly Jaon's guess.

"Perfect," he said. "Ah, Makim, thou scoundrel," he called to the old man who came into the tent. "Hast the stuff to change my friends?"

"Aye," the old man said. He was toothless and quavering with age. There was a young girl who had followed him into the tent. She carried a wooden tray on which were several vials of dark glass. I could not see the contents. She deposited the tray and its contents on one of the pillows. Then the old man asked Har, Scoll and myself to sit before him. The rest of those in the tent gathered in an interested group around us.

I WAS the first to whom the old one turned his attention. He cupped my face in a skinny palm and turned it this way and that in the light which came through the tent flap. Now and then in his examination, he gave voice to a hissing, "tho." Satisfied at last that it was my own face, he squatted at my side, on a heap of pillows, so that he was on a higher level than I, and took up a brush that was on the tray. Opening the stoppers in the vials, he dipped the brush into the brown liquid one contained and daubed my face with the sticky mess.

"Close your eyes," he cautioned. "And don't open them until I say so."

I felt the dry-skinned, stick-like fingers pull at my skin. Felt the brush pass its wet message across my face. And felt him pinch the flesh around my nose several times so hard I let out involuntary murmurs of pain. Now and then I heard one of the audience give voice to words of wonder and knew that whatever he was doing was successful. Then the command:

"Thou may'st open your eyes."

I did so and found myself staring into a mirror.

"No!" I said. "No! This isn't me."

It was incredible what he had done. Naturally dark, he had darkened my skin even more, so that it was actually black. My nose which had been so straight, had a definite curve to it. And a purple scar ran down the length of my cheek, from my left temple to my chin. I had not felt his fingers at my eyebrows. But he had pulled one of them askew lending a devil-may-care look to it. I was not me. I don't know who I was.

Then he went to work on Scoll and I had the privilege of watching him work. I realized that I had not seen all the tools of his trade. He took a slender-bladed knife from the tray and after massaging Scoll's face with some liquid from one of the vials, the old man proceeded to shave the wispy beard Scoll wore. It had been grey and had given him a look that was somehow regal. Then the old man proceeded to dress him up. The contents of one vial gave Scoll a yellow skin. A few touches of a funny-looking brush and Scoll's eyebrows went up several inches at the corners. The eyes became slanted as the old man took some flesh-colored skin from the tray and applied it to the corners of Scoll's eyelids. The new skin narrowed the usual wide-eyed stare into something sinister. And last, the old man placed a new beard on the naked chin. This one was black and was divided into two parts that curled neatly

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past the pointed chin.

All this within the space of several minutes.

I had not noticed that the young girl had left as soon as she had put the tray down. Now she returned. She was carrying a garment of some kind. Makim took the garment and said:

"Remove thy outer garments," to Har.

Har did as he was told, but not until the young girl left once more. Then Makim gave the garment to Har and said:

"Place this about your middle and lace it tightly."

Har did as he was told. And we saw the garment fit him snugly from hips to just below his chest. And when he laced it as tightly as Makim wanted, he looked ten years younger, for it took twenty pounds from his belly and added them to his chest. More, it gave him a look of slenderness that he hadn't had in ten years.

THEN Makim proceeded to shave his head completely bald. I laughed aloud at the sight. After that, the old man stuffed some sort of clay into each nostril, puffing them out to three times their size. I could not recognize Har then, though I knew him all my life.

Last, Makim clapped his hands and the same young girl brought in a heap of clothes and deposited them on the floor and left. One by one we donned the garments, under the direction of the old wizard. And when we were through, he passed the mirror which I had used, to all of us. I shrugged my shoulders in helplessness. I was a stranger to myself as were the others to me.

"You," Sabu said to me, "are Jimna. Har is Rah, and Scoll is Lep."

We repeated our new names after him until we were familiar with them. Then Makim went to work on Sabu. I had wondered how he was going to transform the squat, fat, bald-headed body and the splaynose into something unrecognizable.

It proved to be a simpler matter than I thought.

Makim merely padded the clothes Sabu was to wear until he looked even fatter, if that were possible. A turban was fitted so tightly around his bald skull that the flesh stood out around it. Then he pasted some of the skin around the width of Sabu's nose until he had flattened it down to his satisfaction. And applied the material he had used in Har's nose. Only this time he used it on the *outside*. Like a sculptor, Makim molded the greyish mass until he had built up Sabu's nose into something presentable, although somewhat on the large side.

Last, Sabu was dressed in the clothes which he was to wear. Never had I seen anything so splendid as his garments. Of every color of the rainbow, they were made of the richest and rarest stuff. Silks whose edges were gold-trimmed. Brocades of purple. Wonderously sheer stuffs whose composition I couldn't even guess. And around his middle, a belt of woven gold, carrying a scabbard that was a mass of scintillating jewels.

"And now," Sabu said when he had done with looking in the mirror, "I will show you the jewel that will open the gates to the palace. Jansu!"

Like a Djinn, Jansu appeared carrying a small pillow on which was something which sparkled with all the brilliance of the sun. It was a diamond. But a diamond the likes of which I had never seen. As large as a pigeon's egg, it was eight-sided. And even in the muted light of the tent it flashed with all the cold colors of ice on the top of Mount Ginza.

"And now, Doan, do you think that

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Sutan will find my gift pleasing?"

I could only murmur a "Yes. Yes."

"May I see it?" Scoll asked.

JANSU passed the diamond to him. Scoll looked closely at it. A look of vast surprise dawned on his face.

"What do you call it?" he asked.

"Heaven-Born."

"Heaven-Born my foot," Scoll said. "This is the jewel of the Hasa tribe and if I remember correctly, it was stolen from them some odd ten years ago."

"An excellent memory," Sabu murmured. "You are right, my friend. It was taken from the right . . . no, the left eye of that huge stone idol they worship. But Sutan doesn't know that. And I'm quite sure you won't tell him."

"Of course not!" Scoll snapped. "I only mentioned the fact of the jewel's origin to set matters straight. I like my facts."

"Facts," Sabu snorted. "Pish! Tush! If you had been a little more interested in the matter of Sutan's reason for inviting you and your daughter to his court, we wouldn't have to go through all this."

Scoll got on his dignity then.

"*I* haven't asked you for anything."

"And I assure you, that if you had I would have refused!" Sabu said. "But because Doan is the son of one who was one of my dearest friends and because of what was done for me by this man, I must risk the lives of my men in this venture. So keep your peace!"

"Sabu is right," Har said coldly. "You've a temper, Scoll. And a clacking tongue. They go well together. But keep both in restraint or *I* will teach you how to control them."

Scoll leaped to confront Har. His voice fairly crackled in anger:

"You fat oaf! You witless dolt! I have twenty years on you but I'll wager a pretty that I can whip you, for all your size."

Jaon's thunderous laughter filled the tent.

"By the All-High!" he shouted. "You have brought us a fine stew. Quarrelling birds and a silent bantam. These need women to tend them not warriors."

Sabu gave Jaon a dark look. And I saw Har's mouth open, as he made ready to retort.

"Jaon is right," I said softly, although I was as angry as a thwarted stallion. Their damned quarrels could wait until we'd accomplished what we set out to do. "As for me, I see no reason for all this talk about jewels. What difference does it make? If it is the means of our entry into Shalmar, then I don't care if all the Hasa are breathing down my neck! And as to our personal quarrels, let them wait until we are done."

"So the bantam *can* talk," Jaon said. "And wisely too."

"Enough then," Sabu said in tones of finality. He began barking orders. "Jansu, get the caravan ready! Jaon, I'll want a hundred men escort. And see to it that none of their weapons are to be seen. Makim, am I and the rest done?"

"But for one thing," the old man said. And in an instant he set that matter right. Sabu, although he had a large moon-face, was not fat there. Makim placed a piece of the grey-colored mud into each cheek. Not even Sabu's mother could have recognized him now.

CHAPTER VII

SHALMAR was a golden mist, rising from the dawn of a new day. The snow-white stallion I was riding snorted and tossed his mane. I turned in the saddle and surveyed the long string of camels behind me. Ahead, Jaon and three of his men were an advance guard. At my right, Har, also on a snow-white

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stallion, rode in all the dressed-up magnificence of Basu's personal bailiff. And under the panoply of a golden-covered sun shade, sat Basu the Magnificent, astride the only black camel I'd ever seen.

But what brought a smile to my lips, was the sight of Scoll on the pygmy camel that was given him as Basu's personal physician. His legs hung almost to the ground. And because of the peculiar gait of the animal, Scoll jounced and bounced with every step.

We were descending the last of the shallow hills which led to the shoreward side of Shalmar. We would enter the city by one of the lesser gates. The Golden Gate was reserved for those who came by boat from more distant places.

The sand muffled out every footstep. The sun rose in the heavens. And Jaon rode back at break-neck speed to tell us that Sutan's welcoming committee was sighted.

They came racing to meet us, fifty men, mounted on beautiful racing camels. They were armed with the circular, hide shield and curved sword that was part of their trade. And at their head rode a man I wasn't anxious to meet face to face. But it was too late to turn aside. Their leader rode directly up to Basu and saluted him with sword to lip. Then, looking around at the rest of the caravan, he said:

"Merchant. Sutan bids thee welcome. Thee and they fellow travellers. I have come to act as guard of honor for thy caravan."

Basu answered in a voice as thick as soup and as honeyed as temple wine:

"This poor merchant, come from a far and little-known place, is greatly honored by the thoughtfulness of your great and good master."

I noticed that, while Ginta used the formal manner of address, Sabu used the familiar. My camel-herder, turned merchant friend, was a diplomat of the first water.

Ginta lifted the sword hilt to his lips once more and turned his camel to ride at the head of his troops and came face to face with me. I looked him squarely in the eyes. He wrinkled his brow but did not stop. I saw that he was puzzled. And I knew that if he saw too much of me that he would penetrate the disguise. But I hoped by that time to have done with our task.

"He didn't recognize you," Har said, as he reined his horse in close to mine. "But that vulture isn't to be easily fooled. Can't you develop a slouch or something. Those damned square shoulders of yours are a dead give away."

I nodded soberly. Har was right. But there wasn't anything I could do about it. My posture was a matter of habit. And I knew if I pretended to another, I would forget, and probably in a moment when I needed it most. Better, I thought, to take the lesser chance of recognition. He hated to but he was forced to agree with me. We heard the sound of shouts and the bellowing of camels. We looked toward the sounds and saw that we had arrived at the bronze gates that guarded the outer portals of Shalmar. Our journey was at an end. Now the dangerous part.

OUR caravan created a great deal of interest, particularly Sabu's black camel. The people stared in open-mouthed wonder. I could not blame them. Sabu had dressed the camels in the richest of coverings. And the men who rode them were as well turned out as the animals. As for his bodyguard, a picked group of camelmen, they were complete in scarlet even to their head dress. Of them all, I was the most somber, being covered in a black robe which covered me to my throat. It was a volu-

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minous covering, hiding, as it was meant to do, the sword I wore.

One by one, we crossed the moat which guarded the walls of the palace. The golden gates swung open and we entered the palace yard. I had never seen it before and I gazed in open-mouthed wonder. Peacocks strutted their vanity about the tree lined avenues which led in a gentle slope to the Golden Palace. To our right a tremendous pool shimmered reflections from the sun. And as we arrived at the first of the hundred and one steps which led to the top, heralds, blowing their announcement from golden horns, gave warning of our arrival.

Ginta, who had led us all the way, leaped from his camel and walked over to Sabu.

"My master bid me to tell thee that there is room in the royal stables for the mounts and camels," he said. "And also that thy men may use the barracks. And now, sir merchant, Prince Sutan desires thy presence."

Sabu dismounted and threw us a glance. We interpreted it to mean that he wanted us to accompany him into the palace. Har and I followed his lead in dismounting. When Ginta saw us dismount, he asked:

"Are these men to come with thee, merchant?"

"But, of course," Sabu replied easily. "One is my bailiff and the other man has custody of the jewel which I have brought as a gift for your master."

Ginta nodded his head satisfied with the explanation Sabu offered. From the corner of my eye, I saw Scoll start to follow but even as he took the first step in our direction, Jaon turned him neatly about and holding fast to an arm, made him go along with the rest of the men.

There were a hundred and one steps. I counted them, one by one. We were all breathing a little heavily before we reached the top. It was the first of a series of barriers Sutan had erected with the idea that whoever negotiated them would have lost his dignity before the end.

The great golden doors swung wide. We entered a vast, empty hall and followed Ginta across it. Our footsteps echoed hollowly on the marble of its floor. I couldn't understand the reason for its emptiness nor why we had to traverse it. Another pair of doors confronted us at the end of the hall. When they opened, we were stopped by a half-dozen guards, naked but for breech clouts. They mouthed something to Ginta who pointed a finger to each of us. And before any of us could realize their intentions, they ran expertly prodding fingers over our robes. I being the first to feel their searching fingers was the first to be found out. Ginta's face was an absolute blank, as the guard brought forth the sword from under my garment.

THE discovery that each of us had weapons elicited only more of the strange sounds from the guards. And I understood why they seemed strange. The guards were deaf mutes. Ginta favored us with a frown. And Sabu, as usual, had an explanation for our weapons.

"We were told," he said in easy explanation, "that there were bandits to be found among the hills. And so, of course, I instructed my men to wear their weapons."

"Under their garments?" Ginta said, sneeringly.

"Openly, they might have brought on an attack," Sabu said.

Ginta shrugged off the explanation as though it was beneath him to argue such a ridiculous point. He motioned coldly with his head for us to follow

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him once more and set off across this smaller hall. Only this one was as full of men as the previous one was empty. And they were all armed to the very teeth. I felt a premonition of danger. I didn't like the way Sutan treated his guests. And I didn't like Ginta's manner. It was the manner of the spider who has watched the fly walk into his den. Too, I remembered that it was this very Ginta who had taken Har and myself prisoner in our abortive attempt to revolt against Sutan.

I continued to walk behind Har but with the deepest misgivings. We went through an archway which was a mass of gold filigree. Another series of steps confronted us. And Ginta said a strange thing:

"These steps are the only entrance and exit to the inner shrine of my master."

I saw Har go pale. It was as if Ginta had said, "there is no escape." The steps wound around and we followed their winding. Every ten stairs, there was a sort of alcove in which were stationed several guards. At last the interminable stairs came to an end. And we were in the hall of Sutan, the mighty. We paused at the head of the great hall. Flute columns sent their dainty shafts to the very roof, which was a huge dome of many-colored glasses. Peacocks strolled in graceful parade among the columns. It was a circular hall and we saw that it was well-guarded. For there were many guards stationed at regular intervals along the wall. In the very center of the hall was an immense pool on the edges of which were many girls, reclining at their almost naked ease along the marble edges. They gave us curious glances as we passed them. But our attention was centered on the man seated on the great golden throne at the far end of the hall. He sat in pensive state, one hand holding his chin in support as he stared at us through narrowed, contemplative eyes. A circle of thin gold, gem-encrusted, sat on his thin curly locks. Even seated he looked formidable. There was a brooding quality to his look, as if he were dissecting us mentally, figuring out the real reason for Sabu's visit.

At his side stood a tall, half-naked warrior. When we came close enough, I saw that this warrior was more than tall. He was a giant. Darker even than the guards, his swarth skin was flawless. He held his thick arms folded across his chest. An immense sword rested against his middle. He also gave us a stare that was like his master's. Only in his I detected a something that held a quality that was different from Sutan's. It was as if he was thinking, how soon can my sword bite into their throats?

We marched up until we were directly in front of, and just below the golden throne. Sutan still stared, nor did his expression change in the slightest.

"This," Ginta said in introduction, "is the merchant Basu, and his personal bailiff and the custodian of the jewel."

"I bid you welcome," Sutan said.

I was surprised at his voice. In so large a man, I had expected a deeper voice. But his was almost like a woman's, yet resonant and filled with a something that was like a physical consciousness of his power.

HIS eyes passed over each of us in turn. Then came to rest at last on Ginta. He made a barely perceptible sign to our guide, who on receiving it made his way upward to the throne where he bent and whispered something into Sutan's ear. Sutan nodded in silent understanding. Then he said:

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"Here beside me, Basu, among these pillows and tell me why I have been honored by this visit."

Basu and Har and myself moved simultaneously forward. I saw the giant's hand tense as we moved. When he saw that we were only coming up to sit on the pillows spread before and beside Sutan his fingers went lax.

As we made ourselves comfortable among the pillows, slaves came forward and passed sweets among us. And as if our arrival was a signal a handful of the maidens we had seen lying at the pool-side, arose and began a slow and languorous dance to the tune which a hidden orchestra played. It was a haunting tune, yet I couldn't say I'd ever heard it before. I looked up and saw that Ginta had disappeared. Then I noticed that there was a sort of passageway behind the giant.

"Mighty Sutan," Basu began, "the honor is rather mine than thine. But first an apology that I have been so late in paying my respects. You must understand, mighty Prince, that I come from a far and little-known land, many camel-days away."

Sutan gravely nodded his head in a sign of forgiveness. Basu continued:

"And it finally came to us, in the back-woods of our community, that thy father, the great Hatan, was dead, may his soul rest with the All-High.

"But even in the hinterland of my residence, there is still memory of his greatness. Thus I thought it meet that I bring a small gift to his son. If I may, mighty Prince," he thrust his hand at me.

Slowly, I unwound my turban and revealed to all the contraption which Makin had placed on my skull. It was a little cage, which had been placed securely against my skull and held there by means of some strange paste. My fingers fumbled at the little door and when they emerged, they held the glorious diamond which Basu called, "the Heaven-Born."

A concerted gasp of delight came from those gathered near us. I could not blame them. Its light rivalled in splendor, that of the sun which came through the colored glass of the dome. Even Sutan was startled by its size. He sat erect and leaned forward, the better to see. Then he motioned with his head for me to bring it closer.

"Beautiful," he murmured as I handed it to him. "Never have I seen so large, so fabulous a stone. Where did you get it, Basu?"

Basu lifted his shoulders and arms in a gesture of nonchalant indifference.

"A bauble," he said softly. "I regret only that this poor merchant can bring nothing of greater worth to Sutan the Mighty."

Sutan pursed his lips at the words.

"So! A bauble, the fine merchant calls this. Truly, he is a person of distinction. And what, my friend, can I give you in return?"

Basu's eyebrows lifted. His face expressed a palpable surprise.

"Want?" he asked. "Surely Sutan jests! I came only to pay my respects. Nothing more. Oh yes, there is a matter of a dozen kegs of oil which I have brought."

"Oil?" Sutan was startled.

"Yes. We have a herb which grows in our mountain fastness, a herb with strange healing property. From it, we distill an oil which breaks the 'chilling fever' and by applying it for a week, will cure the sick completely.

"Truly fine gifts. And you ask no pay. Then stay, at least as my guests, until your departure."

ALL the while this talk was going on, the dancing girls continued with their sensuous moving. And the slaves

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passed their sweets-laden trays to us and the handful of the palace familiars.

I sucked noisily at mine, as a barbarian from the hinterland would do. Har, glutton that he was, took more than a fair share. Under cover of a natural cloak of curiosity, I looked about me. I had seen from the first that No-Rah was not among the dancing girls. Perhaps he kept her hidden from prying eyes. Or perhaps . . . but I didn't want to torture myself unnecessarily. I was taken from my introspection by hearing Basu say:

"Beautiful! Beautiful! But in my land these would be thought of as ordinary."

Sutan laughed in delight. Sobering in a moment, he said:

"By my father's beard, I love thee, merchant. In another instant you will tell me, I suppose, that you have some of these beautiful creatures in your caravan. Disguised as camel drivers, no doubt."

Basu feigned sorrow, and said:

"Had I but known, oh mighty Prince. . . ."

"No, no! Enough! You have done enough, merchant," Sutan hastened to console him. "I was only . . . yes?"

The last was said to one of the palace group, someone who was not among those surrounding us. He threw himself on the floor and said in muffled tones:

"Mighty Sutan, if I may speak in private to thee . . . a matter of state."

"Will you excuse me, merchant? Perhaps you are tired from your long journey and wish to retire? I will send slaves with you. And if you desire, slave girls, to pass the time."

We arose and Basu said:

"Many thanks. Perhaps for my young men, here. But not for me, the sensual pleasures of the appetite. Therefore with your indulgence, we will retire until the morrow."

Sutan clapped his hands and a half-dozen slaves came running.

"Show these, my guests, to the Royal suite. And tend to their wants as if they were mine."

We followed the slaves from the hall and into a long corridor almost to its end. There we were shown into a room which was large enough to hold all the camels that were in our caravan. Tapestries hung their silken shades on the walls. Three couches, large enough to accommodate three people each, stood along three of the walls. We had not been there for more than a few seconds when several women entered, each bearing a large container of water, scented with the attar of flowers.

Basu dismissed them abruptly, saying:

"Bring food. We are hungry. Bathing can wait."

THE slaves and women left and we were alone for the first time since entering the palace. We waited until the doors closed on the last of them and Har let out a sigh of relief.

"Well," he said. "We're in, anyhow."

"And I don't like it." Basu surprised us with that.

"Why?" Har asked. "What makes you say that?"

"Because I was listening with all my senses and not alone with my ears. Sutan was too buttery. And if you remember, that Ginta sneak whispered something to him when he brought us to Sutan. I wonder what it was?"

"Basu is right," I said. "Something is wrong. Else why did Ginta say what he did about that stairway?"

"Bah!" Har ejaculated. "Let us not get like women, afraid of sounds and suspicious of whispers. I say we took him in. And until we know other-

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wise, let us act as if we did."

"It may be too late, then," Basu warned. "But there isn't anything we can do . . . now."

Har yawned widely. I, too, found that I was sleepy. In a short while the women returned, bearing trays of steaming fragrant food. We ate heartily, especially Basu. Done with the repast, we sought the warmth and comfort of the couches.

Sometime during the afternoon, I was disturbed by the sound of smothered movements in the room. But though I stayed awake for a few moments, I heard nothing else and came to the conclusion that I had been disturbed by my over-working imagination. I was awakened by the sound of a discreet knock at our door. The late afternoon sun's light was streaming through the windows of the room.

It proved to be one of the slaves who had only come to inquire whether we were rested enough to come to the main hall. We rinsed our faces in the fragrant water and followed him to the hall, where Sutan was awaiting us.

He was dressed differently than he had been earlier that morning. Now he wore a close-fitting jacket of gold mail. His legs were encased in rather tight trousers whose bottoms were brought up close around his ankles. He was pacing restlessly along the edge of the pool. And close behind him was the gigantic black whose normal position it seemed to be. He gave us a perfunctory nod. It was evident that he was mentally engrossed and that he was waiting for someone else to come because he continued his nervous pacing even after our arrival.

Ginta came into the hall from the far entrance. He was followed by several of his men. . . .

"Well?" Sutan demanded brusquely.

"We have the ringleader," Ginta said.

"Good! Where do you have him?"

"In the palace compound."

"And his so-called lieutenants?"

"Also."

Sutan turned to us. There was an evil smile on his mouth.

"If you are interested, I have something to show you. I am sorry that I do not have those who were here several days ago, because I think they would have made better sport, but these will do."

The words didn't make sense. But we understood him perfectly. He had taken prisoner the ringleaders in a new revolt and he was going to show us how he treated them. I wouldn't have pondered too much on it if I hadn't seen the broad grin on Ginta's face. That grin wasn't alone in contemplation of the fun he was going to have. Because I caught it as he was turning from looking at us. I swallowed painfully. We weren't in any position to be caught now.

SUTAN'S scowl had disappeared. He was smiling broadly as he turned and strode from the hall. We followed close behind. The compound was directly behind the rear of the palace. Along the entire wall were rows of wooden barracks. The compound was between the barracks and the palace. I narrowed my eyes against the sun, sinking in the west. The white sand threw back blinding reflections making the three figures who were in the center of the compound dance in a haze. Then we were close enough to see who and what they were and I caught my breath. I knew one of them.

There were three. One, the one I knew, tall, slender, with premature white hair, a poet and scholar. The others were strangers. But that they were of the same stripe as he I had no doubt. For in their ascentic features

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were to be seen that which said they knew more of books than war. But here they were, tied to a stake in the compound of the tyrant, Sutan. And surrounding them were a host of other tyrants.

I felt a bitterness rise from within me. I knew I was to see terror loosed on these men and I was helpless. It wasn't long.

Sutan strode up to them. My friend, seeing who their visitor was, stood erect for a second, then the effort being too much, slumped back against his bonds. There was such a diabolic look on Sutan's face, I quivered in horror. Sutan walked forward until he was standing directly in front of the tall man. We followed closely.

For what seemed an interminable period Sutan only stood and stared into the other's eyes. If he expected the scholar to show any signs of fear or servility, he was mistaken. But he did get the other to speak first.

"This is rather childish," my friend said in a tired, flat voice. "If you are going to torture us then let's not waste time in these games. I assure you that were our positions reversed—but they aren't. So. . . ."

"Fine." Sutan said heartily. "Good. Now we are brave. The fear of death is gone, now that death is at hand. Brave words indeed. But I am curious . . . how will you act . . . but why be curious, Sutan. Let us put them to the test. Ginta!"

I hadn't noticed it before, because Ginta had moved on ahead of us, but now I saw that he carried what looked to be a fishing pole. At least it looked like one of the slender reeds to which we'd attach a piece of twine. Only this pole was of metal. And running down its length from a reel attachment, was a flexible length of wire, at the end of which was a curiously made barbed hook.

"As I recall, Ginta," Sutan said reflectively, "you told me, when these were apprehended, that you had caught 'some fish.' It gave me an idea. Fish! Now there is a sport. The trout in the stream. We cast for him. And he bites and then . . . that's right, Ginta, we play him for awhile. If he is strong enough, he gets away. If not, we reel him in and *gaff* him.

"Here we have three fish. Let us leave them free, one at a time. And we shall be the fishermen. If he gets off the hook, then he'll go free. But if he succeeds in getting free, then freedom in reality will be his." He turned to my friend, who was regarding him with a wide-eyed expression. "How would you like that? Now isn't that a sporting proposition?" Sutan asked.

" 'Tis said, there's nothing lower than snake dung. But it's a lie. Sutan is lower. And viler," was the answer to Sutan's question.

SUTAN bent at the waist at the words. It was like the crouch of some wild animal who has seen his victim approach.

"Brave words," Sutan growled. "But now we are come to deeds! That little rat, there!" he shouted. "Undo that minnow."

Two of the guards stepped forward and undid the bonds. They held him close while Sutan walked all around him.

"Strip him naked," Sutan said, and his eyes sunk into themselves.

I watched in horrified spell as the guards tore the clothes from the little fellow. Then Sutan addressed him.

"See those men there," he said.

The other nodded wordlessly.

"They are the haven you must reach. If you can get to them I promise you freedom. But if Ginta reels you in, death is yours."

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Once more the other nodded in mute understanding. And the guards stepped forward and tied his hands behind his back. There was a moment of tense waiting while Ginta moved back some fifty feet. Then at a nod from him, the guards released the prisoner. He gave us a single look of mute appeal, then set forth for the men at the far wall.

He hadn't gone ten feet when Ginta cast. The hooked barb caught the fleeing man squarely between the shoulder blades in the soft flesh there. The human fish let out a high, keening sound of pain. He whirled quickly, trying to loosen the barb that way but it stuck fast. His shriek of pain was echoed a thousandfold by the assembled watchers. I could only grit my teeth and watch helplessly. He whirled again and seeing that it was useless, ran straight for the fringe of guards at the far end of the compound. Ginta let him run until the wire was a slender sliver of metal, stretching out into the sun. The reel sang thinly. And the *fish* was almost at the end of the wire's length. Then, and not until then, did Ginta begin the game. For suddenly, he braced his feet in the sand and began to reel *in*.

The barb must have been deep within the flesh for the caught *fish* stiffened, as the wire went taut. And as Ginta continued to reel in, the poor human at the other end began a slow, grotesque dance, first a few steps backward, then whirling against the pull moving forward. But always there was the compelling urge of the barb.

"He's going to try again," Sutan said softly. And his eyes showed horrible delight at the game he had devised.

Ginta had reeled him half-way back, then gave him slack once more. The little man bent at the knees and I could hear his gasping sob. Slowly, he came erect. The wire hung loosely in the sand. He looked at it and turned slowly and began to run anew. Ginta didn't let him go too far this time. And when he began to reel in, the man at the end no longer resisted the pull of the reel.

"Bah!" Sutan yelped in disgust. "He's giving up! "Gaff him, Milo."

The giant, who had been standing beside Sutan, a silent but interested spectator, stepped forward. In his hand was an immense club on the end of which was a single large, curved spike.

HE MOVED toward the human fish on cat-walking feet. At the sight of the giant and his lethal weapon, the little man made a last desperate effort to escape. But this time Ginta didn't permit him even a little slack. And I noticed something odd. There was a raised place perhaps a few feet higher than the rest of the sanded area. The giant, Milo, was moving toward that spot. The game was now approaching its end. We could see the terror in the little man's eyes as he came closer to his doom. *And Ginta gave him slack.* The *fish* leaped forward on flying feet. Ginta let him run just so far, then began to reel in once more.

This time he reeled him in until he was almost to where Milo could reach him with the club. Milo swung, a vicious swipe, but missed when Ginta let out a little slack, enough to let the other get away from Milo, but not too far. Then he reeled in once more. And this time when he gave the slack, the other only stood there, his head buried against his chest and waited for the executioner's club. The end was swift, a single hooking blow and the *fish* hung suspended from the hook. And like a fish that was caught, Milo swung him across his shoulder and carried him to Sutan.

Sutan looked down at the bloody

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carcass and kicked at it with a sandaled toe. It moved and a small rivulet of blood ran from the gaping wound at the back of the neck.

"Good fishing," he called to Ginta, who acknowledged the compliment by taking a small bow. "Now another," Sutan commanded.

I felt my stomach twist in horror. *That thing at Sutan's feet was still alive.*

There was a strange smile on the second man's face when they released him at last. We understood why, when he started to run. The reel sang its song of pain and the barb sank into his flesh. And like the other he whirled. Only unlike the other he continued to whirl, wrapping himself into a cocoon of wire. He whirled on lightly skipping feet, drawing ever closer to Ginta. I caught Sutan's expression from the corner of my eye. There was a look of concentrated amusement on his features. As if he enjoyed this beyond anything.

In the meantime the *fish* continued his pirouetting. I had begun to wonder when it would end, when he suddenly braced himself and started to run at an angle to Ginta. An involuntary cheer came to my lips as I perceived the reason for his maneuver. Ginta couldn't use the reel with the wire so tightly wrapped around the man.

Ginta let him go as far as the wire would permit, then hauled hard at it. The cheer died in my throat. The man at the other end of the wire came up short as the wire went taut. I saw what was the matter. Ginta was not only stronger, he was also heavier. And in the tug of war which followed, sheer weight was of more importance than muscle. Slowly but surely, Ginta hauled the other in. This time there was no fooling around on either Milo's or the fisherman's part.

And I watched them strip my friend. I breathed a silent, heart-felt prayer to the All-High, to make it short. Not to let him suffer, as the others had done. And the game began again.

He ran as the first one did, straight for the guards at the far end. And Ginta made his cast as he did the first time, when he judged that the *fish* had gone far enough. The barb caught. Ginta was a superb fisherman. He never failed to make a strike. The barb caught and we resigned ourselves to another tragedy. I saw the stark look of pain light my friend's face. He ran forward a few feet. Ginta's face was alight with savagery. There was an expression of crafty expectancy on it. He was judging exactly the distance that he was going to let his victim go before he brought him up short. I had the feeling that this time they would permit this victim all the leeway possible, so that there would be the most sport.

But my friend fooled them. For instead of continuing in his run, he fell, in a twisting way, to the sand. And rolled over on his back. So unexpected was this move that Ginta let him lie there for a few seconds. And in those seconds, the victim was able to do what he had evidently had in mind to do. Grab the slack of the wire in his fingers. Then he stumbled erect and continued to run forward.

He had managed, somehow, to twist the wire so that when Ginta hauled back on it, his fingers prevented the barb from sinking further into the flesh. My friend had beaten the game. It was only a question of a few seconds. Ginta jerked savagely at the wire. But there was too much slack. The *fish* slowed somewhat in his run, but only to lower his head and body to take up the extra few feet. Then he plowed steadily forward. And the reel snapped off of the

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metal pole.

I didn't give a damn whether Sutan heard me or not, I shouted encouragement across the white sand. Only a few feet separated my friend from the promised freedom. And two of the guards stepped forward to meet him with bared, curved swords and chopped him down in cold-blooded butchery.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THAT second, my horror and anger became a flood which rode the crest of a lost common-sense. Turning savagely on the man who had done this thing, I struck him as hard as I could with my closed fist.

The repercussions to my blow were instantly brought to me. I felt a blow as if lightning had descended from the heavens to strike me. Reeling backward, I saw through a haze of blood and pain that Milo and Har were wrestling. Basu stood to one side and I noticed that he watched with an abstract air what was going on. Then Ginta was on me, open sword held at the level of his waist. And from far off, I saw the approaching mercenaries running to help their master.

The blow which Ginta had struck had only a temporary effect. It took no longer time than for him to take the few steps and I was free of the effects and ready for him. And even as I pivoted from the charging swordsman, I saw Sutan slowly rising from the ground where my blow had stretched him. I had no time for sight-seeing then.

Ginta was using a short sword which meant he had to thrust rather than swing or better, fence. He had to get in close to drive the point home. So that when I pivoted away from him, he had to thrust from an off-balance position. The wicked blade drove past my curving body and as his feet swung him toward me in reflex, I brought my right foot forward and tripped him. His hands went up and his feet executed a mad dance for the barest second. In that second I came in, low and hard. I caught him below the hips and still charging, carried him backward a few steps. Then as I felt his body twisting in my grip, I stopped short and threw him heavily to the ground. The sword spun from his fingers and clanged in a couple of bounces away from us. I had no time to recover it. For even as I started for it, I heard Sutan's bellow:

"Stop! Death waits each of you in another second."

I looked up and life seemed to leave me. We, or rather I, had lost. Not that I had expected to win. Rather my vain and hopeless attempt at escape had not been motivated. I had acted from no valid and accepted premise of a possible and reasonable hope of escape. There wasn't a chance in a million that what I had done would have succeeded.

I saw Har had managed to wrestle Milo to the ground. Somehow I found it in me to grin when I saw Har deliver a kick to the fallen man. Then he stepped to my side. But Basu didn't. He remained aloof. There was a peculiar expression on his face. It was a brooding expression. I could not read it. But I had not long to wait for an interpretation.

I felt Ginta's hands propel me towards the waiting Sutan. I stumbled forward the few steps until I stood before him. In the meantime Sutan's mercenaries had arrived, almost too late, and formed a protective circle of steel around us. There was no need for that. We weren't armed. Sutan stood in the center of the circle and watched us with a thunder-clouded face.

"I should have you impaled for that,"

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he said in a low voice.

"Why don't you?" I asked.

"Because," he said, "there are better ways to cool that hot blood of yours, Doan."

I TRIED to hide my astonishment at the mention of my name. I stopped when I realized that since he knew that, he knew the rest also. Our masquerade was over. But what of Sabu? He answered that himself.

"I should have known better," Sabu said. "For is it not said of the serpent, that none is so wise in the way of hidden crawling, except another serpent."

A flicker of a smile creased the thin lips of Sutan.

"Well put, merchant," he said. "Nor can the camel herder escape the smell of dung. One does not place bells on the feet when one goes on the hunt."

Sabu's eyes clouded and narrowed.

"Of course!" he said incisively. "It was Jansu. It has to be. He was the only one who knew of our plan."

"Yes," Sutan said, "I pay more than you. In this world, the one who pays the highest wage gets the best workman."

The sun, a glowing red ball, hung above the far wall, as though it too was an interested spectator. The shadows became long and tired looking. And Sutan stood and stared at us. I wondered what was next.

Sutan broke the spell abruptly.

"Take them to the barracks where the rest of this offal's men are," he said.

They didn't bind us but there was no need for that. We were helpless and they knew it. There was nothing else to do but follow them.

It was a long, low-roofed building, the top of which was of metal. There were a few windows scattered down its length. We could hear the bellowing, cursing voices from a hundred yards off.

"My men do not like their prison walls," Sabu said lightly.

I was surprised to hear the note of amusement in his voice. I could feel no gaiety in me.

Har wore a scowl like thunder which had silently settled on his face.

"What's so funny about that?" he grumbled.

"We're alive aren't we?" Sabu asked.

"Yes. But for how long?" I asked.

Sabu's shoulders lifted in a shrug.

Then we were before the single door that was the entrance and exit of the prison.

"In," Ginta said. And there was a note of disappointment in his voice. I understood. He had hoped that Sutan would have had us executed then and there. Sutan had other plans. I knew him. That little drama of the fish. *That* was his idea of an execution.

Although there were just a few windows there was enough light to see by, the sun not having disappeared as yet. I gasped when the first person to greet us was Scoll.

"So. The conspirators had their wings clipped," his bitter voice struck us like the tip of a whip.

"Shut up," Har said tiredly and dropped to the ground. His fat-sheathed muscular hands drew themselves around his drawn-up knees. He looked at us and waited for what was to be.

From a far corner, Jaon leaped forward to greet us.

"What happened?" he asked.

Sabu explained in a few well-chosen words. None of them was printable.

"That devil!" Jaon exclaimed softly. Then his voice rose, "If I ever am lucky enough to lay my hands on Jansu, I swear by the All-High that I'll strangle him. Slowly!"

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SABU didn't answer. He seemed to have retired into a shell of gloom. His face was barely discernable in the half-light which was already fading into the darkness of night. And suddenly for no reason that was explainable, I felt a sense of exhilaration. We weren't dead yet. And while there was the smallest breath of life in me, there was the chance that escape was possible.

"Jaon," Sabu said waking from his introspective trance, "do we have any weapons?"

"Weapons!" Jaon rasped harshly. "If there was enough light, you would see that not only have we no weapons but we barely have enough clothes. They stripped us to the barest of essentials."

Sabu's voice was a murmur of thin sound about which we clustered as if it were a light and we were moths. "So we are a hundred men, unarmed. I don't know what Sutan has in mind for us, but that twisted mind of his will devise something horrible, I'm sure. There isn't much we can do, now. But this I say. We must never become separated. Even if we have to fight with our bare hands. Understand?"

There was a muted answer from a hundred throats.

But from one throat there came a scornful sound. Oddly enough, it wasn't Scoll who uttered it.

"Fight with bare hands, huh? I can just see that! How come these great warriors allowed their weapons to be taken from them without a fight?" asked Har.

That had been bothering me also.

Jaon's voice had lost its sprightliness. And the cocksure manner was gone also, as he gave answer:

"You have a right to ask that. And I have no alibi. For after all we are warriors. Yes! In spite of what you may think!" Suddenly there was a conscious note of pride in him. "But even the best of warriors can fall into a trap. I did. If you'll look through a window, you'll see what I mean. This is the only building in the compound. We were marched through the gate leading into the compound. It was all done so casually that none of us had warning of their intentions. But when the last of us came through, our guard turned, went back through the gate, locked it and as though by magic the whole wall was manned by Sutan's men. They were armed with bow and arrow. A voice commanded we lay aside our weapons. There was no choice. But there was the thought of another moment. So I told them to follow orders."

"You did well, Jaon," Sabu said warmly. "And now we must talk of that other moment. It is a fortunate thing, that I have lived through the last few years. For it taught me to trust no one. Not even my most intimate friend. I didn't know that this would happen. But I guess that deep in my mind there was the smallest thought that it might. So I prepared for it.

"Jansu knew almost everything. But there was one thing he did not know. That I had sent one-eyed Coba and his brother into the Golden Palace."

Scoll grunted a hoarse something. I guessed it was of a derogatory nature. Sabu paid no heed to the sound. He went on:

"It is an art of the highest nature to be a great thief. It requires a cunning akin to the jungle beasts. Like the men who play troubador, the thief must have the knack of being part of the scene so that the illusion can be complete. One-eyed Coba and his brother are true artists. I'll wager a golden, that there isn't one of you who can pick them from any of Sutan's minions."

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Har's voice crackled with excitement:

"By my loins, you are the cleverest man in all this world! But I still can't see how they can get us out of here!"

"I don't think they can, either," Sabu said, smilingly. "No, not out of this building. But I don't think this is the scene of the last act. Not if I know Sutan. I have a suspicion that it's going to take place in that same bloody compound in which Ginta went fishing, today. And to get to it, we must go through the palace itself."

Sabu was right. I saw what he had in mind. If there was any chance to escape, it had to take place in the palace. But I wondered how the two thieves were going to effect that escape.

Sabu went on, "Further talk will get us nowhere. So let us bed down. The morrow will come soon enough."

CHAPTER IX

THE sun's light was a golden mist through the window. I blinked in sleepy wonder. Then as I heard the snores and sleep sounds of many men, I turned on my side to see where I was. I had been dreaming of the beautiful No-Rah. And my lips formed the words, even as I knew it was a dream, "How wondrous is your beauty. How deep do I love thee."

Har was sitting on his haunches, regarding me with that scowl that others thought was anger, but which I knew was thought. I yawned widely and his scowl deepened.

"Fine kettle of fish," he said with his mouth drawn to one side. "I should have stayed . . . ah! But what's the use of talking? The milk is spilled."

There was a bucket of water standing beside the wall nearest me. I rose, and dipped a few handfuls from it, sloshing the warm liquid over my face and rinsing my mouth with the tepid remains. Har was still scowling when I turned to him again. Now the rest of the men were waking. Sabu stretched and the rows of fat along his middle rippled with the movement. He came to the bucket and rinsed his mouth also. There were the grunts of men in their morning habits. A stench arose that was almost unbearable. Scoll voiced his displeasure:

"Must you foul beasts do that in here?"

A dozen voices told him in raucous concert where to go if he didn't like it. Then Sabu quelled the men:

"All right. Save it for another place. Here we are all in the same boat. I don't want it tipped from any of you." He looked directly into Scoll's eyes as he said it. Nor could I blame him. Scoll had a nasty tongue.

A shadow fell across the threshold. We looked up to see Ginta framed in the door.

"You!" he pointed to Sabu. "Come out here."

The shadow and the man were gone. Ginta had turned with his command and had left without waiting the reception to it. Sabu looked to each of us, grinned and followed Ginta. We crowded after him but paused on the very doorstep. The whole compound seemed filled with warriors. And I glimpsed the hundreds lined along the wall. It was a wall of stone and above a wall of steel. Sutan was taking no chance that we might try to fight our way to freedom. They were armed to the teeth.

Ginta and Sabu were in animated conversation. Behind the two men, but not so far they couldn't come to Ginta's assistance at an instant's notice were a group of his men armed with spears. We saw Sabu's shoulders lift as Ginta pounded words at the other.

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Sabu interjected a few words. But the other turned them aside. His face held spots of color high on each cheekbone. The excitement he labored under was evident to all of us. And the narrow mouth held a crooked grin that was a reflection of the thoughts he held.

SABU turned at last and came back to us. His features were down-drawn in thoughtful look. We crowded around him as he passed through the group of us clustered at the entrance and stood in the center of the room. He waited for silence and when it was given to him, spoke:

"Sutan has decided that we deserve a chance to live. But we must fight for it. If we survive, then freedom is ours. I don't have to tell you what little chance we have. There are some among you who remember the little men from whom we took the diamond called Heaven-Born?"

There was a chorus of ayes.

"Those little men brought their grievance to Sutan. And he told them that he has us, the thieves, in his power. But he also told them that because we were so clever in getting the gem, it was up to them to get it back from us."

"So?" Har asked in a quiet tone.

"So they are to fight us, two of them to each of us. In a little while they will take us from here and give us weapons."

"They are going to give us weapons?" Jaon asked incredulously.

"Yes," Sabu said. "I don't think they'll do us any good. I know they won't. Sutan has thought of that. But among Ginta's guard was Coba's brother. He winked to me. Those two have something up their sleeves for us, I'm sure."

Sabu took me by my arm and motioned for Har, Scoll and Jaon to follow. The rest went back to their places along the wall and windows. This time they broke into animatedly talking groups. The five of us sat at the doorway's edge.

"What do you make of it?" Har asked.

"Hard to tell," Sabu said. "I hate to try to out think Sutan. To think like a snake, one must be a snake. But of this we can be sure, that it isn't in his mind to give any of us the promised freedom. Therefore we can safely assume that our weapons will be knives or something of like nature. And that the Hasa tribesmen will be armed to the teeth. But there is always the chance that some of us will survive. There is the rub. What has Sutan in mind for those?"

It was a question none of us could answer. The sun rose, came above the far wall to the east in all its flaming glory. And still we sat and waited the call to battle. A long while passed before it came. I think Sutan was conscious of our mounting anxiety. That was why he waited so long.

The gate at the end of the wall nearest the palace opened and many men marched through. Ginta strode at the head of them. There was an instant's breathless hush which translated itself into a silent, concerted action, as the men arose from their lounging positions and crowded to the single door. Sabu, myself and my friends were in the forefront.

The body of the guards separated themselves into two lines, about ten yards apart, and faced each other. For a second I thought we were to run the gauntlet. Then as Ginta came close and I saw his face I realized that this was not the case.

There were no words, no commands. He made a stiff motion with his head for us to follow, turned on his heel and started back to the gate from which

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he'd come. And like cattle being led to the slaughter-pen, we followed.

The faces of the guards were alive with malice. Their fingers tensed about the long shafts of their spears as they watched us approach. It was easy to see that they hoped we would attempt a foolhardy break to escape. But with Sabu in the lead, we marched in a long column of threes, eyes to the fore, after the stiff-necked figure of Ginta. The gate swung wide and we entered the coolness of the inner palace.

OVERHANGING sun-breaks were set along the whole of the immense wall which hemmed us in. The air in the courtyard into which we were brought was redolent with some perfumed scent. But neither the scent nor the vista of flowers and luxurious vegetation made our eyes narrow and our nostrils flare. It was the sight of the huge number of armed men who were pressed close to the four walls that made us go tense and light-footed. But they were only the precaution Sutan had taken. They watched us warily, as the last of our men came into the immense, stone-floored area.

Ginta paused only long enough to see that the last of us was in, and continued his walk. Straight to the gate nearest us, his feet moved in their regular, space-eating stride. Behind us we could hear the marching, rhythmic sound of soldiery. As he reached the gate, he stopped, turned about face and in a voice heard by the farthest of us, shouted:

"Here is the armory. You will all of you be given weapons. At the time of combat, there will be one who will let you know. I advise against any attempt to molest the guides who are waiting behind the barrier. It will not go well with anyone who does. That is all."

The gates swung open and we marched within. When they closed on the last man it was with the sound of death's own voice, a creaking, squealing sound, like that of a sword scraping bone.

Two men were in the half-light of the long, wide tunnel that was the entrance to the armory. There were a hundred of us. Yet Ginta's warning was so fresh, so implicating in its hidden meaning that, at least as far as I was concerned, there wasn't the smallest thought of attack.

The two regarded us, somber-faced. Suddenly those serious expressions changed. The sobriety dropped from their eyes and in their places warm greeting showed. On their lips, grins appeared as the sun from behind a storm cloud. They came forward as one and stood before Sabu, the grins broad on their ugly faces. I thought they looked familiar, yet I could not place them. But Sabu could and did, vocally:

"Coba! And Maru! By the All-High! How . . . when . . .?"

The two nodded silently and in their very silence was a warning that danger still stalked our footsteps. Sabu stepped forward and I was on his heels.

"Let some of your men stand at the gate," one of them whispered, "to let us know if they approach. Ginta does not know that we are the guards. The two he appointed aren't in a position to show you anything."

"Dead?" Har asked.

I looked over my shoulder and saw that he and Jaon had also joined our group. Sabu quickly despatched several men to stand watch at the gate. Then one of the brothers, I don't know which one, said:

"It's not good. The men whose duties we've taken over had the keys to only one of the rooms in this hole.

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And in that room there are only simple tools for cutting."

"What do you mean?" Jaon asked.

"Throwing knives," was the succinct reply.

I KNEW what they were. A long-bladed knife with a heavy long handle. They were too clumsy to handle at close quarters. And only one versed in throwing them knew how to make them effective. Oh, Sutan was magnanimous. I wondered what weapons the Hasa had.

"But," said the other brother, "we brought something with us that might be put to use."

He turned and walked to a dark turning in the tunnel. In a few seconds he came back, groaning under the spool of wire. Panting, he let it fall at his feet with an oath.

"There!" he said in a tone of satisfaction.

We looked at him, open-mouthed. What did he expect us to do with that.

It was Scoll who had the answer. It was his high, cackling voice who told us what the brothers had in mind.

"Blind fools! Can't you see? That wire, cut into lengths and tied to the ends of the knives. Unless Sutan has given those little men bows and arrows, they don't have a chance, not even with spears."

Well, I thought, perhaps not as good as that. But better, certainly, than those clumsy knives.

We were a lighter-hearted group, one whose hopes had risen from the depths, that followed the two guides who were our friends. They led us down the length of the corridor. In a few seconds, as soon as we passed the last of the metal canopy we felt the slope of the path we were walking. Down, we went. And around, in a winding, circuitous path until I thought it was some strange stair case we were on. And finally we reached a level area. How far below the surface of the palace we were, I had no idea. For we were in a place of gloom. Stone walls enclosed us, their sides dripping with moisture. The air was damp and foul-smelling.

We had come to a halt before an immense door whose smooth side showed no break in the metal. One of the brothers inserted a key which he took from the girdle of his tunic, into a slit in the metal. The door swung open and we entered a huge room. I shrank from the fetid odor which came up in waves from every crevice in the stones of that room. It was as though all the dead spirits had risen to greet us.

"What manner of charnel house is this?" Scoll choked out from his throat.

"Pfah!" Jaon grunted. "Another trick of that ape, Sutan. I suppose he thinks to frighten us with the ghosts of his tortured dead."

We needed no second sight of the racks, thumbscrews, buckets which had once held boiling lead and other little inventions of torture, to know that this room was once the chamber of horrors for some poor men. I had no belief in ghosts, but if there was such a possibility, then certainly this room could be the scene of their operations.

Now it was a room used as an armory. Great racks lined the stone walls. Most of them were empty. But one rank held a number of the oddly shaped knives which we were to use. Joan stepped forward and pulled one from the rack. He ran his finger across one side of the double edge. A whistle of surprise escaped his lips.

"Sharp! Damned sharp. I didn't expect this."

HAR had, in the meantime, walked to one of the other two racks which held weapons and took one of

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the double-bitted axes from it. Like Jaon, he tested it for sharpness. A grunt of disappointment told us that they would be useless. The rest of us crowded around Jaon who began passing out the knives. There were exactly enough to go around. No more. No less.

"I don't get it," one of the men said. "What's the idea of having just so many of these things?"

Sabu answered him, "Sutan never intended us to use these in the way they're supposed to be used. He wants us to come in close so that we'll have to use them as swords."

I turned to one of the brothers.

"Do you know how long before we will be called?"

He shook his head. "No," he said. "But I don't think it'll be long. The little men are already waiting. Which reminds me. We'd better be getting back. Ginta has a suspicious soul. And we must find the room where the woman you seek, is."

I had almost forgotten No-Rah in the excitement. I gave soulful thanks to Sabu who had *not* forgotten.

The two, one short, one tall, walked to the door, paused on the threshold and turning as one, grinned at us. Then the tall one said, "Sutan will be sitting in a tier to the left of the center gate. That gate leads to the chamber in the middle of the palace. Try to draw the fight out until the sun is just below the wall's edge. Then make for that gate. It will be open. One of us will be waiting you to guide you further."

I wondered as they turned and departed, what Sabu had done for these two that they risked their lives with such complete forgetfulness of self. And too, I wondered about that jackal Jansu, and how much Sutan had bribed him with. I wondered too, why Sutan's position in the stands was brought out. There were no answers to any of my questions.

"Then let's get to work," Har said. Quite suddenly his dour mood had departed. Now that the moment of action was near and the weapons were at hand it was a different man than the one they'd seen and heard.

Jaon looked at him with a new-found respect. And even Scoll gave him a sharp look and nodded his head in satisfaction at the incisive way he had spoken.

Many hands joined in unrolling the spool of wire. And as they unrolled it, Har measured off lengths of wire, two axe handles long. He had taken up the axe and had stripped himself to a loin cloth. Fat he was. But beneath the fat the muscles rippled in effortless and rhythmic measure as the axe came down on the unrolling wire, cutting it neatly into the proper size for our needs. Jaon's eyes lit in pleasure as he watched Har.

"It's hard to believe," he said in a low voice, as if speaking to himself, "that there is so much power in so fat a body. That dull blade couldn't cut suet, yet the wire parts as though it were a twig he's cutting."

No one gave commands. The men went to work as though they were part of a team. Several began to pass the knives out to others who taking up the wire made it tight around the shafts of the knives. I saw that someone had knocked the blade of an axe loose from the handle and had pounded it into a soft spot in the rock floor. Others had lifted the spool onto the handle so that is unrolled as Har wanted it to.

IT DID not take long. The knife felt good, its steel nestling snugly against the flesh. I looked about me and saw that the men were stripping themselves of all the encumbering garments. Most

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of them only allowed themselves the barest of essentials.

We had closed the door after one-eyed Coba and his brother had left. Not that we were worried that someone might see what we were doing. But Sabu had last minute instructions which we did not want to be overheard.

"All right, men," Sabu's voice boomed out when the last of us had taken the knife. It was the Sabu of the caravansary who spoke now. "I think all of you were in the party who raided the Hasa. So most of you remember how we fought them in their compound. We were mounted then. And had the advantage of our spears. What we will face out there I don't know. But the Hasa like to bunch up in a compact group and wait for their enemy to come in. Then they strip them of their effectiveness by taking out small segments of the attackers and cutting them up. Death means little to the little men.

"Jaon and myself will take the lead. Follow us."

We waited, tense, expectant, for the moment of our crisis. I saw that most of the men had done as I did, rolled the wire around their wrists so that it would not show. At least the wire had the appearance of bangles.

This time there was no talk. Each man was wrapped in his own thoughts. Some of them were fated to die. Others would suffer wounds which might make their lives, if Sutan kept his promise to release those who survived, a horror to be faced for the rest of their lives.

I found it strange that I didn't think that I might not be killed. I could only think of No-Rah and her beauty. I could only think of that moment when last I had seen her at her father's court before I enlisted the aid of Har in my ill-fated crusade against Sutan. The moon had silvered the red-bronze of her hair. Her eyes had the far-away beauty of the stars. I had held her warm, pulsing body close to mine, the youthful cups of her womanly beauty were against my chest, softly moving against me. We kissed in farewell and the remembrance of her lips, first cool, then burning with a fire which stirred us both to a passion that was not of this earth. I had taken her hand and led her to the stone seat in the garden and had sat beside her. Then . . . but it was useless to think of the rest. *I had to live!*

And like a thunder-clap which echoed its reverberating sound over and over in my brain, there came the thought. That if I went out there in the arena, if all of us went out there, what chance did we have? Even if the two who were striving to save us did find a way. Didn't the one tell us to hold off until the sun sank? But by that time it might be too late. All of us might be dead.

And with that thought came another. That didn't we stand a better chance while there were a hundred of us, poorly armed though we were, than when there might be only twenty five.

My thoughts became a voice that stilled their thoughts.

Sabu looked at me, his brow clouded, his eyes buried in somber thought. The rest waited with bated breath to hear his verdict. Even Scoll watched him as if in the fat, little man's hands was the salvation which seemed beyond us.

"Doan is right," he said at last. He sighed as he said it. And I realized that he was tired. And old. But the spirit which had kept him taut in his drive to rescue the woman he had promised the son of his dearest friend, still held him in thrall. "I should have known it. That whatever is in store for us out there can only end in death. And as Doan says, better go down dragging

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the weasels with us than die emptily spilling our guts on the sand while Sutan watches. There is one thing which bothers me, however. Whether Sutan has anticipated us?"

"Look," I said. "Here's how we do it. We'll wait until he sends the courier for us. We'll follow until we reach the tunnel which will lead us to the arena. Then we will grab the man or men and force them to lead us to the palace. From then on, it will be in the lap of the All-High."

MY IDEA caught on. There were murmurs of approbation from the men. Like wildfire, confidence spread among them and their eyes suddenly mirrored a wild exultation. The door opened and three men made their appearance into our midst. So savage was our appearance that the three fell back a few steps as though they were suddenly afraid that we were going to attack them.

"Well?" Sabu asked, coldly.

One of them took courage. "Follow us," he said.

They turned and started down the long, damp and winding corridor. Perhaps they wondered at our silence. Perhaps the gleam they saw in the eyes of the men made them pause. But after a few feet, one of them turned and peered closely at myself and Sabu, who were practically treading on his heels.

"No need to hurry. The others haven't been told off yet," he said.

Sabu grinned and said, "The sooner we get there, the sooner we go free."

There was a sly look in the man's eyes as he said:

"Yes. We've heard how you came walking in to take Sutan. And who knows, perhaps you'll walk out as easily?"

Then we were at the turning where the corridor straightened and we could see the great gate. Wordlessly, Sabu leaped forward and grabbed the nearest of the three about the throat. I was not far behind. But the one in the lead, either through some sixth sense or because he took it in his head to turn at that instant, suddenly twisted his head.

Fear lent his footsteps wings. And the narrow corridor echoed with his wild screams. I held my man in a grip of steel and futilely cursed the break that could have brought our house of cards tumbling about our heads.

Suddenly I was shoved aside. Jaon stood before me, the throwing knife in his hand. Slowly, he brought his hand back. The man was almost at the gate. And like an arrow shot from the bow, the knife sped for its victim. I guess we all held our breaths, it was that close, for the other was clawing at the gate, when the blade struck him and impaled him onto the wood. Our cheers reverberated wildly down the length and breath of the canopied corridor.

I twisted the man I was holding, about until his face turned livid with fear and his breath shivered in his throat.

"Don't. Don't kill me," he pleaded.

"Just like a fly," I promised. "Unless you lead us out of her."

"No! No! Sutan would have me put to death, worse than yours."

"What's the difference?" I said. "But die you will, one way or the other, if you don't do as I say. And if you do, maybe freedom can be yours."

"Hold your tongue!" came the sudden command from Sabu's captive. They were his last words. Sabu brought his knee up until it rested in the small of the other's back. Then he cupped the man's chin in his thick palm and pulled back, back, until the neck snapped like a piece of dry kindling wood.

"And so will you die," I said sav-

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agely. "Unless you tell us how to get into the palace."

Slowly my grip on his neck tightened. His head came back. There was a creaking sound. And his voice shrieked suddenly:

"Stop! Stop. I'll tell."

"Then quick," I said. "Before Sutan gets to wondering what happened to you."

I LET him up. He staggered, then straightened. My knife creased his flesh, so close to him did I hold it, as he turned and led us back the way we'd come. Where the corridor made the turning, we took another path. This one led in a straight line to another one of the immense gates. He stopped before it and looked at us with fear in his eyes.

"There are guards behind it," he said in warning. "Because this is the gate which leads directly to the inner palace. Please," he suddenly begged. "What are you going to do to me?"

I stepped away from him and ordered some of the men to pull his clothes off. With them, I made him fast, tying them so that his wrists were tied behind him to his throat in a slip knot. If he struggled too hard against the confining bonds, he would only strangle himself. Then I stuffed a gag in his mouth. They dumped him to one side.

Sabu was looking at the gate in a worried silence.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"How do we open it?" he asked.

"Let them open it," I said. And pounded on it with the metal shaft of my knife.

Like magic, the gate swung wide. Beyond the curving arch of the open gate I saw a wide expanse of courtyard. For a second, I thought it was the same through which we'd passed on the way to Sutan's private chamber. Then I saw that there was no pool here.

"Take them!" I heard Sabu shout. My vision narrowed to what was immediately before my eyes. A dozen guards lounged about. The two who had opened the gate still stood, their hands upon the huge handles and their faces reflecting the sheer amazement they felt.

Our attack was silent and vicious beyond words. The knives weren't meant for close work but in this instance they served. All but one of the guards died instantly, without the chance to open their mouths. But that one escaped, screaming at the top of his lungs.

"After him," I shouted. "He'll lead us to the inner palace."

He reached another door at the far end of the courtyard, passed through it, and swung it closed behind him. It splintered under the pounding of fifty men gone berserk. But the time the escaping man had achieved was sufficient to sound the alarm, a tocsin sound that seemed to echo through every part of the palace.

We were in a place of fluted ornamental columns. Above us was a huge, curving, circular roof, made of glass so that we could see the heavens above. Dark, storm-tossed fragments of clouds obscured the face of the sun. And from between the clouds a ragged, jagged streak of lightning shot. There were a hundred of us. But in the immensity of that columnned hall we were lost. Silence greeted our entry and made us pause. The men unwound the stretches of wire from around their wrists. We waited for something to happen. It was as if we had been marooned in this desert of beauty. The lightning flashed and the thunder rolled. And still we waited for the drama to begin.

Suddenly there was the sound of music. It began softly, minor chords in a muted orchestration. Then there

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came the louder, more clashing sound of brass and drums. It stirred our senses. It was music that was meant for marching feet and clashing arms.

I heard Sabu expell his breath in a long, sibilant sound. And turned my eyes to where he was looking. From a half-dozen directions they were coming to meet us. They were the cream of Sutan's palace guard. And leading one of the columns was Ginta. Then, from behind us, there was a scream of voices. And from the door through which we'd come, there cascaded the little men of the Hasa.

I read the indecision in Sabu's eyes. There was no time to lose.

WITH an exultant yell, I leaped forward, straight for the column of men headed by Ginta. Behind me, I heard the pounding feet as the rest followed my initiative. The knife swung on its length of wire.

There was room for four men to fight abreast. But I did not want to meet them head on. For they wore armor. And we had none. So just before we came face to face, I swerved and raced around several intervening columns. I had no time to outline a plan of attack. Yet Sabu had divined my intention. For as I ran parallel to Ginta's men, I saw that Sabu had taken a large number of our men around the fluted columns to the other side of the enemy. And from the front, Jaon was rushing a headlong attack.

We struck at the same time. They didn't have a chance to deploy to meet us.

Our knives flashed down upon them from above, and struck that part of them which was not protected, their heads. I whirled my knife about me as if it were a lasso that I was using on a horse. Bracing my feet, I brought it down hard. The enemy was too close pressed to escape the consequences.

The knife struck and continued on its path, as it passed completely through the head of the man in front of me. I had taken it off from the right ear, down across the whole face until the blade came out just below the chin. A geyser of blood followed its passing. I moved forward, slowly, whirling my weapon as I went. And wherever it struck, I drew blood.

The battle had started in silence. Now there was the scream of men in agony, the shouts of men maddened by the blood-lust. And above all there was the clanging, clashing sound of metal striking metal. For by now, Ginta's men had thought to use their shields and swords to evade and stop the whirling knives. The sheer, desperate heroics of our attack had surprised them. They had lost half their effectiveness before our attack spent itself. But we had lost also. And the sheer arithmetic of numbers was in their favor. They were ten to our one.

Sabu and those with him met our group. I saw that some of them had taken up the swords and spears of those who had fallen to their knives. So had some of my men.

"Fight through to where Ginta came from," I gasped.

Sabu's voice was a bellowing banner around which the rest rallied. We formed a wedge which plowed through the broken ranks of Ginta's men. But Ginta was not alone now. The others had joined the fray. They had come from all sides. And as we went forward, they stabbed at us from the safe distance of their spear lengths, chopping us down one by one.

It was a race to see whether there would be enough of us left to escape. We won but at a terrific cost. I looked around and took count of our numbers

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as we made the safety of the door. I gave thanks to the All-High that Har and Scoll and Jaon were still with us.

"Master! Master," a voice called to us.

I turned in the direction of the sound and saw that we were in the center courtyard. The brilliantly plumaged birds still strutted in vain parade around the edge of the pool. The huge golden throne still stood on its dais at one end of the courtyard. But now it was empty. As was the rest of the yard.

"Look," Sabu breathed in my ear.

I FOLLOWED his pointing finger and saw three figures on the staircase to the right of the throne. There was no need to take a second look to see that the one in the center was No-Rah. I forgot all else, the pounding on the door behind us, the fact that we were still in the palace, everything. I had to get to her and take her in my arms and smother her mouth in kisses.

Then the throne was shoved aside. Two figures appeared from behind it, Sutan and his giant bodyguard, Milo. They were stripped to the waist. In each right hand, a long sword was clasped. And as they slowly came down the four steps which led to the courtyard proper, men spilled from the opening behind the throne, like water from a broken dike.

"Quickly," one of the brothers called. "Up here. We have the key to escape."

They were nearer to the staircase than we. Yet when I arrived at the bottommost step, I was alone. I took them three at a time. Behind me, I heard the pounding of Sutan's feet in close pursuit.

There was a curve in the stairway which hid the three at the top. So that when I came to where they were, the surprise of what I saw held me spellbound. There were five men battling on that staircase. No-Rah, a hand clasped to her breast stood pressed against the railing. Her eyes reflected the love she felt, as I reached her. I had time only for the quickest of caresses before I joined one-eyed Coba and his brother.

Three men were slashing at the brothers, with knives. Then there were three against three, as I joined the fray. And even as I did, I wondered what had happened to Sutan and Milo. I had not time for thinking, then.

One-eyed Coba and his brother may have no peers as thieves. But as warriors, they had yet to learn the smallest rudiments of the art. How they had managed to survive, I didn't know. Perhaps it was the cautiousness of the men attacking them that permitted the two life. I made short shrift of one.

"The girl!" I said sharply as I evaded the thrust of a knife. "Get her to safety."

I parried the thrust of the long knife. But even as I did, I knew it was only a matter of time before its long blade would seek out a vital spot. The weapon I was using was not meant for thrust and parry. And once more my opponent was lunging on cat-like feet for me.

Suddenly, I side-stepped and as he passed me, I took the wire in short and brought the knife down in a swinging arc. The blade cleaved him from skull to chin. And stuck there.

I felt a pain, as if a red-hot poker had skewered me. No-Rah screamed something. I whirled and for the first time saw who the third man was. Jansu! Jansu the traitor. The man who had a price. He was poised, waiting for me to fall, I guess, for his knife had struck deep in my body. And I could feel the life blood welling from me in a crimson tide. His eyes went

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wide, then narrowed as I started for him. His lips parted in a sorry grin. And one hand went up in a defensive gesture. I moved slowly toward him and as I came forward, he retreated. I became aware of the smallest sounds, the shouting of the men in the courtyard below, the broken accents of No-Rah's voice, the splash of water at my feet. But when I looked down, there was only the blood staining the floor, the blood that was pouring from my torn body.

My fingers were extended in front of me. They were making clutching gestures toward Jansu. He kept backing away from me. His voice babbled nothingnesses to me:

"No. No! Die, damn you! No. You can't . . . stop! I'll kill you."

Then I leaped forward. The knife went up and came down. But I wasn't there to meet it. Somehow, I stumbled to one side. It passed me with a futile hiss of sound. And I was in close, with my fingers deep in the traitor's throat. He struck me twice and with each blow I gagged and sighed. But my straining fingers never stopped their squeezing. And quite suddenly, I wasn't squeezing at warm, pulsing flesh. It was a rag doll I was strangling. I felt the idiot's grin on my mouth, as I turned to face No-Rah. Odd. There were more than one of her. The whole balcony seemed filled with people. I could make out two Sutans, and several Hars. I wondered where they all came from.

"How . . . how did . . . you . . ."

I fell down into a bottomless pit. . . .

CHAPTER X

"EASY, now," I heard a voice say. It seemed to come from a long way off.

I opened my eyes and blinked them rapidly once or twice to clear my vision. I was in a room of strong lights and white walls. My vision kept blurring, so that the strange instruments on one of the walls kept shifting oddly in and out of focus. And once again the voice said, "Easy, now."

I felt the touch of a hand on my arm. For the first time I looked to either side of me. Nora was to my left, Nat Hyer on my right. I was sitting on a leather settee. I felt an encumbrance across my skull. My hand went waveringly to it. And of a sudden I knew where I was.

"Go ahead. Take it off," Sutan said.

I was all mixed up. Only a short time ago, it couldn't have been more than a few minutes, I was fighting for my life with . . . with who? And like a dream, that something which had been so fresh in my mind only just now, was already fading until the memory of it was like sand drifting on a dune.

"What happened?" I asked.

"This gentleman performed a remarkable seance," Scoville said drily.

Then it all came back. How we'd come up here, the argument we'd had, and the experiment. I was curious as to how it came out. I took Nora's small warm hand in mine, and grinning like a schoolboy who'd been asked to come up to the stage to help the magician's plea for a stooge, I asked:

"Well? How was I? Am I the perfect medium?"

And was surprised to hear Scoville reply, "Yes."

But why had Scoville been the one to say yes? It had been Sutan who'd performed the experiment. A great light dawned on me, then. I remembered what the tawney-eyed blond man had said, when he placed the head sets around our skulls. That we would all be part of the scene I would conjure up.

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I laughed aloud and turned to Nora. To my surprise there was no echo to my laugh. And when I looked into her eyes, I saw the troubled reflection of the blue orbs. Hyer cleared his throat with a sound that somehow startled me. He was fiddling with the head set and his eyes were on the intricate wiring of it.

"Look, Mister Sutan," Scoville said grumpily. "I don't know what you were trying to prove with that rather remarkable business. I must confess that the images projected on my mind by whatever machinery your man there used, was so real that even now, I feel as though *this* was the dream world. Would you mind enlightening us?"

I wondered what Scoville meant? I certainly knew that I couldn't remember anything.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Mean to say you can remember what happened? That you are still in that place I dreamed up?"

"Yes," Hyer said. "Don't you?"

"Nope."

"How about you, Nora?" Hyer persisted.

"Oh yes," she replied in a low voice.

"Then how come I don't?" I demanded of Sutan.

"You do," came the odd reply. "But only in your sub-conscious. And that sub-conscious is like the part of the brain which records impressions and stores them for the future. When the time comes or rather when a scene impinges on that part of the brain that will remind it of what had gone before, then you will receive literal images again."

"I don't get it," I said.

"I do," Scoville said. "But I still don't get this drama of the head sets and the rest. What were you trying to prove?"

SUTAN stood up and stretched his arms above his head. The muscles rippled like snakes in a dance. He smiled, all but his tawny eyes.

"I told you in the beginning," he said, "that this is my hobby." He pointed to the circular shaft of a room. "I should have said," he continued, "that it is only one of several. Physics is my real love. I had always wondered if it was possible for someone to be in two places at one and the same time. I proved it tonight."

"Ridiculous!" Scoville snapped.

"You were in two places at one and the same time," Sutan persisted.

"Imagery," Scoville said.

"No. For that place was as real to you as this."

"Then how is it possible for Byrnes to be here? When we came up the stairs, he was dying."

The grin on Sutan's face broadened. "Who knows," he said, "whether or not his wounds were fatal? Or whether or not he succeeded in getting the girl? For he pulled the headset off at that moment, breaking contact with that world."

"I see," Scoville sneered. "And when will it be possible for him to know?"

"When a scene impinges on his brain that will remind it of the other world he lives in, then he in fact, will revert to that other world."

"Revert! Then the other world was, shall we say, existant only in the mechanism," Scoville pointed out, triumphantly.

Sutan showed irritation. "No," his voice showed signs of that irritation. It was pitched on a higher note. "He still lives, or has succumbed to his wounds in that other world."

"Then if he *has* died in that other world, he is dead in this. And by the same token, if he was wounded there, the wounds should be visible here. Fur-

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ther, he was not the only one wounded. Hyer also should show marks of the knife blade," Scoville continued to break down Sutan's arguments.

"Aah!" Sutan's voice gave pent up release to his disgust. "I said that we can exist in two worlds. That does not mean the two are synonymous. He can die in that one and still live in this. Furthermore all this is futile."

"What do you mean?" Hyer asked.

"Just this. That if Byrnes should be reminded of . . ."

"Yes?" I asked when Sutan paused.

". . . Nothing," he said. But there was something in his eyes. Something that was hidden behind the blond lids, that I didn't like. Quite suddenly the air was charged with hidden things. I felt a faintness stir at my vitals. Once more the room whirled around me.

" 'S matter, Don?" Hyer asked, solicitously.

"Nothing," I said and shook my head, hard, to give the lie to my words.

"I think Byrnes needs a little air, outside air," Sutan said. "Let's move back to the drawing room, shall we?"

THERE was a chorused sound of agreement to his suggestion. As we passed through the door leading back to his other quarters I noticed the absence of the dark-skinned giant and the woman. But before I could ask what happened to them, Nora took my arm. There was a strange urgency in her manner, and as she held me back a little so that we should be the last through the door, she whispered:

"Don. I . . . I'm frightened. And I don't know of what. *He* frightens me. What we just went through, why, I can remember every incident."

"Can you?" I asked excitedly. "Tell me. Where did it begin with you?"

She looked away from me, as if she was ashamed of what she had to tell.

"I was lying on a couch and he was bending over me. His fingers were caressing me and when I opened my eyes, he kissed me and said, 'You are mine, now. Your Doan, hah, no longer will he bother me.' "

I realized then that what I had experienced was mine alone. The others had experiences doing only with themselves. Wonderingly, I speculated on what they were. I knew it was a useless thing to do. Or was it? Perhaps later, at Hyer's, we could all tell just what happened to each of us. It would make an interesting tale.

Just as we reached the oddly-shaped drawing room, I felt a recurrence of my dizzy spell. Nora, her face showing concern, suggested that I get some air. As I started for the outdoor, she fell in step with me. But with my dizziness, I also felt a nausea. I had an idea that I was going to be sick.

"Better not," I said. I grinned somewhat somberly and continued, "I think . . . I'm going to be, er, ill."

She understood. And suddenly kissed me with a strange passion and wildness. I returned the pressure of her lips and held her off when the caress was done and looked at her.

"I love you," I said. "You know that, don't you? I've loved you ever since that day in the store."

"Yes, dear," she replied. "And I've loved you since that day when you came in and looked at me and your funny face came out with the grandest, most beautiful grin. I guess it was that grin that decided me."

I wanted to go on telling her how much I loved her. But just then I received a flat warning that I'd better hurry to the outside before it was too late. Hurriedly excusing myself, I made a wild dash for the outdoors. And barely made it.

I decided to walk to the water's edge

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and rinse my mouth. The moon was full. The water was a smooth lake of molten silver reflecting the beauty of the moon on its placid bosom. The sand buried each of my footsteps and waited for the next. *I walked toward the edge of the water and looked at the moon . . . at the lake . . . at the moon . . . until each became inseparable from the other . . . until the silver ran together and changed to gold and the water turned blue and the sun was high above and in the near distance, a city rose up out of the sand, whose turrets shone golden in the morning haze.*

And from behind a nearby dune, four riders, mounted on snow-white camels rode into view.

THE END

The Myth-Maker

★ **By Sandy Miller** ★

"THE grandeur that was Greece and the glory that was Rome." That magnificent line of Poe's expresses perfectly and delicately the feeling we have today for the cultures that nourished our western civilization.

"The grandeur that was Greece—," oh, how perfectly that expresses the nature of the literary heritage that little land left us. Greek mythology with its myriad of allusions to the gods has enriched everyone. Let us more deeply examine the people who created them. Like so many legendary creatures the gods of the Greeks were made in their image—only more so. Grecian gods were like their human counterparts except that they were stronger, more beautiful, and in every way superior. They married, had children, required food and sleep even as humans. The blood of the gods, "ichor," had the power of producing life and it was never diseased.

The gods did not hold themselves aloof from mortal men, for it was a common custom for them to mingle with the mortals, producing children—"demi-gods," or heroes, usually known for their strength and courage.

But the major difference between ordinary mortals, demi-gods, and *the* gods, was that the latter always retained their distinguishing mantle of immortality, even though at times they wished it to vanish. The gods possessed all powers. Time and space meant nothing to them. They could become invisible, they could change themselves into any animate or inanimate object.

They dressed as mortals and were so armed with conventional bows and spears and shields. They rode chariots drawn by celestial animals. They lived on Mount Olympus, Greece's highest peak, each in their individual dwelling, usually of lavish structure. When the council chambers of the gods met, the beautiful strains of Apollo's lyre filled the air, and the Muses, those patrons of the arts, delivered magnificent melodies. Great temples were erected to the gods by the mortals, in which rich gifts were presented to them and in which sacrifices were offered. On occasion it was known that even humans were sacrificed to the gods although this was a rarity.

Earthquakes, storms and almost all natural phenomena for which we have very realistic explanations, were attributed by the ancient Greeks to the activities of the gods. Thus a storm was the raging angry god of heaven venting his wrath. A billowing ocean was the god of the sea, hurling out his anger.

But not all their allusions were to rage and anger. In fact most offered very beautiful images. For example, daybreak with its lovely streamers of light coming over the horizon were supposed to be the rosy fingers of the goddess of dawn drawing away the mantle of night. What could be more poetic! By personalizing all these natural events, the Greeks contributed a singularly rich and beautiful scheme of imagery to our knowledge, regardless of the lack of scientific and technical accuracy. It has been suspected that the gods were often deifications of just extraordinary mortals, whose deeds swelled with the repetition of their relation. Bards and tellers of tales elaborate, built on legends, a vaster legend which was to form the core and basis of mythology.

As an example consider the god Orpheus, son of Apollo and renowned for his music-making. If he had lived today no doubt he would have been a prominent music-maker, and honored as such, but the Greeks, with their characteristic license, attributed to him the music of flowing water, and many of the beautiful sounds that occur in nature. Certainly it takes a high order of imagination to create such a lovely theme. And that is the entire theme of mythology.

The ancient Greeks exercised their imaginations so freely and so delightfully, that we see now that their legendry and mythology was a poetic creation of the highest order. When one considers Nordic mythology, or even Asiatic mythology, one

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sees a certain coarseness and lack of imagination, both of which are entirely lacking in Grecian mythology, where the poetic elements come first and foremost.

This can be shown by considering, too, ancient Roman mythology. Actually the Romans took their mythology from the Greeks, that is, what they were capable of perceiving, and while we note a great similarity in Roman and Grecian mythology, we can see that the former is crude and barbarous and lacks the delicate poetic imagery and sensitivity that so characterizes the latter. When the Greeks settled on the Roman peninsula, they found a mythology already in existence, many of the concepts of which they adopted into their own scheme of things. And where the Greek touch landed, is easily detectible in the revised Roman legends—that is, those which exhibit poetic tendencies. "Oh, the glory that was Greece . . ."

The Mental Tool

By Fram Ferris

MATHEMATICS has received its rightful share of praise. It has been discussed from every angle and even the layman in the street is familiar with the contributions it has made to our civilization.

"Higher mathematics" generally means to the novice, the calculus. To those unfamiliar with mathematics the calculus is regarded as an esoteric, mysterious form of mathematics with which modern science abounds.

Strictly speaking, however, the calculus is just the end-point of elementary mathematics. In other words, when one has studied the calculus, one has completed his "basic training." This is very true.

The physical sciences, physics, astronomy, chemistry, etc., all utilize this basic mathematics very profitably. Without it, in fact, science as we know it, would not exist. We think of mathematics as the tool or instrument the scientist employs in his work. While this is true, it is one of those half-truths which we humans believe.

Mathematics is a branch of human thinking, possibly the most abstract form of human thinking, as abstract as music, if not more so. Mathematics is not something one discovers, or something that exists in some way around us. Contrary to popular belief, nature has no mathematical laws. Mathematics is not a system to which our universe conforms. Far from it.

Mathematics is purely a human way of describing things, an attitude, a means of looking at and examining relationships between "things." If these "things" happen to be events, like say, the falling of a stone, fine! But to say that there is a mathematical law governing this incident is to be incorrect. The symbolic language which constitutes mathematics is no more than a description of what is occurring.

When we examine two stones, we can, if we are mathematically inclined or not, abstract from these stones everything—including the stones themselves! What is left? The fact that there are two of them. This "two" we recognize intuitively as something that describes a property that the two possessed and which is, in a way, independant of their existence.

Much thinking is like that. We abstract in mathematics, that is, we remove from many complicated events and phenomena, things which seem to be the essence of them.

Mathematics has been called a game. It is that but, in addition, it is more than a game in that it possesses such an extreme utility. Consider how often mathematical systems have been created, apparently bearing no relationship to reality whatsoever and having not a bit of practical utility. Chance and probability, non-Euclidean geometry, the theory of groups,—all of these subjects were studied without one practical thought whatsoever. Now look at them. Probability is at the very base of modern physics today. Without it, hardly any of the great advances in atomic and nuclear physics would have been made. Non-Euclidean geometry turns out to be at the very basis of our space-time continuum. It has been discovered that Euclidean geometry was merely one way of looking at our world—not necessarily the correct way. In fact, on a universal scale, simple Euclidean geometry does not apply.

The theory of groups is another subject whose importance cannot be exaggerated. It is involved in everything from atomic physics to telephone exchanges.

Then there are those who think that the greatest part of mathematical thinking has been done. They think of Grecian math as the core of it all. They fail to realize that in truth we are just on the threshold of a new and glorious era in mathematics.

More genuine original mathematics was created in the last one hundred years, than in all the centuries preceding this time! Yet most people think the converse is true. It is not. And we are just beginning. So much is being done in mathematics that it is impossible for one man in his whole lifetime to have any more than the most casual of acquaintance with a great deal of it. He may know one little thing well—the rest he just knows about.

What our century now needs is a genius who can inspect all that has been done and from it create some sort of unity or perhaps synthesize some new form of the subject.

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He lay on the bed, his body covered with the long white fur, and anger blazed in his eyes as his wife suggested calling in a doctor . . .

By Robert W. Krepps

Some men make their fortune easily, but with Uncle Jack it was a long process of being thrifty—even with his own body!

MY MOTHER used to say that you could walk from Times Square to Topeka and never find such a stolid and staid couple as my Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Jack. "They're in a solemn little rut, like two tin people on a trick Swiss barometer," she'd say. "You be polite to 'em, but never imitate 'em. You get some fun out of living." And I'd agree, and promise I'd never thrust a foot into my grave till I was ready to lie down in it.

And I often wonder what Mother would say these days if she knew what I know about Uncle Jack, and about what Aunt Dorothy did after he was dead; but I'll never tell her, because I think it would shock the living daylights out of her.

* * *

It was a crisp, frost-on-the-window, see-your-breath morning in December; it was a couple of years ago, I was about twenty, and I was lying under four or five blankets wishing I could stay there till spring, when Aunt Dorothy whisked into my room. She was a plump stubby woman, pleasant in the face and short in the wind. She saved string, mainly because Uncle Jack was always telling

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her it might come in handy some day. "Waste not, want not," was his pet admonition. He wasn't miserly, you understand, he was simply careful. He loathed extravagance and ineconomy with all his heart.

Well, in blew Aunt Dorothy without so much as a knock, which showed she was pretty shaken up over something, and sat down on the edge of my bed.

"Bill," she panted, "I'm uneasy in my mind."

I made a noise of mingled inquiry and laziness, and yearned for a hot water bottle.

"Bill," she started again, "it's your Uncle Jack."

"Jack, shmack," I said to myself rudely, wishing it were Saturday, and aloud I said, "Uhmm?"

"He won't allow me to watch him shave," said she, pathetically.

"The inhuman beast," I said to myself, and "He won't?" to her.

"No. For twenty-three years more or less I've been watching him shave. I love to watch him shave." Two large and incredible tears rolled down her pink cheeks, so that I woke up and realized that something was honestly wrong, and "It's one of the few pleasures I have always been able to count on," she said, snuffling a little.

I sat upright in the chill air, shivering, and tried to look intelligently curious.

"For weeks now he's locked the door when he shaves. He won't even talk about it. And his hair's turning white, and I know something's dreadfully, horribly wrong."

"I've noticed his hair."

"Yes, whiter every day. Why, he's not yet fifty," she said, wringing her hands. "What can it be?"

"A guilty secret," I said before I remembered it was Uncle Jack I was talking about, and added immediately afterward, "no, it can't be that."

"Yes, Bill, it's a secret all right, and I've just come to the end of my rope. I want you to find out what it is. Why he won't let me watch him shave."

I bundled out of bed and hunched into my bathrobe, and we went down the hall to the closed bathroom door.

"Have you looked in the keyhole?" I whispered.

"Bill!" she said, scandalized.

"Okay, I will," I said, and I bent over and did it. For a minute I couldn't see anything plainly, and then things came into focus and there was Uncle Jack, peering into the mirror, shaving. He had on a pair of trousers and an undershirt, and he looked awfully white, but with the frosty window behind him and the fluorescent light over the mirror I couldn't be sure just what was oddly different about him. . . .

"Is he there?" hissed Aunt Dorothy.

"Shaving," said I.

SHE asked something else, but I was concentrating on Uncle Jack and didn't answer her. He was a plump, Pickwickian little gentleman, about as ordinary as a salt shaker, and when he wasn't saying Waste Not Want Not he was saying Haste Makes Waste, but now he was shaving faster than I ever did, with short lightning strokes, and the queer fact was—it hit me with a jolt and I gave him a double-take—he was shaving his forehead.

I told Aunt Dorothy in a whisper what I had seen.

"Does he often shave his forehead?"

"His forehead? Of course not. Don't be silly. Why would he shave his forehead?"

"I don't know," I said, "but he's doing it."

"We'll have this out with him now," said she, in an access of decision which was as foreign to her as Shintoism, and

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she banged heavily on the panel of the door. "Jack, Jack," she shouted, "let us in. Hurry!"

Uncle Jack said, loudly and distinctly, "Damn it!" and then he shouted, "No!"

But Aunt Dorothy pounded and yelped, and pretty soon the door clicked and wheezed and opened, and the pair of us trooped in.

Uncle Jack had put on his shirt and buttoned it up to the neck, though he didn't have a tie with him, and he stood, arms akimbo, trying to stare us down and make us feel that we were intruders upon his sacred privacy. He hadn't got all the shaving cream off his face, either. There was a dollop on his right temple and smears along his throat and the side of his nose.

"Well, Dorothy," said he coldly, in much the same tone he used if she spent an unwarranted nickel on a new thimble.

"Don't bluster at me," she said, although if that was blustering I was a South Sea Islander. "I want an explanation."

"Oh? An explanation," said he, beginning to snort a bit through the nostrils.

"I'm waiting," Aunt Dorothy told him, tapping her foot on the tile.

There were one or two other pieces of clever repartee, and then Uncle Jack wilted and looked mournfully at her and "Well, Dorothy," he said, "if you must know you must know." And he unbuttoned the top three buttons of his shirt and spread it wide, so we could see his chest.

It was all covered with white bristly hair, thick and coarse-looking, like the nap on a rug; hair about an inch long!

Aunt Dorothy screamed. Uncle Jack frowned and looked peeved and said "Oh, hush, woman!" For myself, I simply gulped and swayed forward to get a better look.

And then fat little Aunt Dorothy clutched his arm and brought his hand up to the light. It was covered with a whitish fuzz.

"All over," he said sorrowfully. "I'm growing it all over. Face and all. Been growing it for weeks, and I've had to shave my face and hands every morning. I think it was that blasted polar cub."

Some months before this, you see, they had gone on a junket to the zoo, and Uncle Jack in a rash moment had reached through the bars and tried to fondle a polar bear of tender years; its needle-sharp teeth had neatly removed the first joint of his little finger. We had heard of the incident half a dozen times a day until suddenly, I suppose about the time the white fur had begun to sprout, Uncle Jack had ceased to villify the cub and forbade Aunt Dorothy to speak of it again. I guess he was sensitive about it. It was so bizarre a thing to happen to someone like Uncle Jack.

"Of course it was the cub," said Aunt Dorothy, taking it all for granted. "Probably his teeth were septic. Well, Jack!"

"Well, Dorothy," said Uncle Jack, with all the melancholy of the doomed in his solemn little face. I went out and closed the door behind me.

WE KEPT Uncle Jack's shame a secret between the three of us. Every so often I'd slip into his room in the morning and he'd show me how the hair was progressing on his chest. It wasn't exactly like a polar bear's fur, for it was sleek and pure white and beautiful, but I doubt if any polar bear ever took the care of himself that Uncle Jack did. The fur grew faster and faster, and he took to shaving twice a day. Even so, he'd get a kind of five-o'clock blanching, a hoary canescence like a

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rime of frost on his face and the backs of his hands.

At last he gave in to it. He stayed in bed one morning, refused to get up and go to work, and wouldn't see anyone except Aunt Dorothy and me. He said, in a peevish tone, that a man couldn't be expected to shave all over three times a day, and he *wouldn't* parade the streets like a blessed freak of a half-man-half-sheep-dog, and in short, the hell with it. So he stayed in bed, with his wife and me bringing him trays and arguing with him, and he grew fuzzier and fuzzier.

After a week he looked like a mild-mannered old monkey peering over the red blanket at us. His facial fur was softer than the coarse stuff on his body, and it parted in the middle of his forehead just above his eyes and went sweeping off over the temples to his ears. After another week he had furry muttonchop whiskers and his speech was growing rather silky from talking through the long white hair on his upper lip. In a month he had turned into a fairly good imitation of a silvery-white sloth, and all he did was complain about the lumps in the mattress and how uncomfortable it was when he slept on his side and the fur got turned against the grain and prickled.

Finally Aunt Dorothy, much against his wishes, swore our doctor to utter secrecy and brought him in to look at Uncle Jack.

He hemmed and coughed, polished his glasses, took a look at Uncle Jack's chest, fingered the truly fine white cavalry moustache which drooped over my poor relative's lip, and said he had never seen anything like it and the only thing to do was shave it off. At this Uncle Jack got into a frightful temper and sent him packing out of there, while Aunt Dorothy wept into her lace hanky, and said she didn't know what was to become of them. Uncle Jack peered under his white shag at her and said indistinctly that he had known for a long time it was a unique blight that he had, and bringing in a blasted doctor to tell him he had been bitten by a polar bear and ought to shave was simply throwing money into a sewer, and Waste Not Want Not, hang it, woman, and it was all expressly against his wishes.

He then turned over, caught a tuft of his fur in a crack of the headboard and let out a screech, and began swearing to himself in a muffled monotone.

AS THE months went by, with Aunt Dorothy and I conspiring to keep people out of Uncle Jack's room, he grew furrier and furrier; his body hair was now as long as an adult polar bear's, if not a shade longer, and sometimes he would get up and undress and brush it carefully with a pair of military brushes, for he was always a tidy man and liked to keep a good appearance even if no one but his wife and nephew ever saw him. His head looked wonderful, like some curious animal out of the frozen wastes of the northland which had been grooming itself in preparation for the mating season.

He grew quite vain when I said one day that he looked distinguished, and spent some hours staring at himself in the mirror; he then got up, dressed in his Sunday best, and proclaimed his intention of taking a stroll down into town. It took some high argument to put him into bed again, and we only accomplished it after Aunt Dorothy had insisted that he would be shot on sight as an escaped brute from the zoo.

After this episode he seemed to lose heart, and groaned a great deal, and sometimes wouldn't brush his fur for days at a time, so that it got knots and tufts and snags in it and lost some of its

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hoary lustre. He ate less and less, and finally one day he told us he thought he was going to die.

Aunt Dorothy rushed out and brought back the doctor, who had been calling up every day to find out how the disease was progressing, and the doctor brushed aside the hair and took my Uncle Jack's pulse, tapped him here and there, said he was sound as a dollar and ought to shave, and reluctantly left on the crest of a tide of profanity from the afflicted one, to whose frugal soul this extra expense was nothing short of wormwood.

That night Uncle Jack said that Aunt Dorothy must always remember Waste Not Want Not, and that I was to continue to be a help to her, and he was sick of this damnable silly pelt, and he thought he would die. And he did.

Aunt Dorothy had her cry out, and then we put our heads together to decide what we could do about poor Uncle Jack's body. We didn't dare let anyone in to see him as he was, and I didn't like to shave him myself, so we talked and talked and couldn't decide anything.

Finally we went over and stared at him as he lay there, looking like an enormous mound of glistening-white weasel skins—if I may use that simile without disrespect to the memory of Uncle Jack—and Aunt Dorothy got a strange gleam in her eye.

I asked what she'd thought of, and she said quietly, "Your uncle's favorite expression, Bill," and went out to make a telephone call.

A couple of dignified gentlemen came around to the house the next morning, and after a great deal of muddled explanation from Aunt Dorothy and myself, they were ushered into Uncle Jack's room and left there alone.

We held the funeral several days later, and Uncle Jack really looked quite natural, although worn and wasted by his long confinement to his bed.

And when Aunt Dorothy, some months later, began to move out into society again, everyone said how splendid she looked in her wonderful new furs; expecially her magnificent great white neckpiece.

Waste not, want not, as Uncle Jack used to say.

THE END

Mass Suicide

★ By William Karney ★

THE lemmings are similar to field mice in appearance. They are brown with a black stripe down the middle, and about five inches long. They have a unique way of taking care of their overflow in population.

In 1868, the captain of a ship coming into Tronheim Fjord in Norway, saw the water covered with these small animals swimming with all their might out to sea. There were millions of lemmings in this mass. Usually these lemmings live way up on the mountain tops, or on the Arctic tundra where they live on grass and bark of dwarf trees. Every now and then there are so many lemmings that they outgrow their food supply. When this happens, millions of young lemmings move away, coming down into the valleys eating everything along the way. Their enemies, the fox and hawks, follow them and are joined by sea birds that leave the water to feed on the little animals. As they cross streams and lakes, many are gobbled up by fish. The hogs, cattle and even reindeer who are usually vegetarians, take to eating lemmings. Quite often disease breaks out among the hordes, and millions die of "lemming fever."

When the survivors reach the sea, they think that it is just another small stream and try to swim across, but before long they all become exhausted and drown. Back up on the tundra, very few lemmings remain. But they begin to multiply and after a time, the lemming emigration repeats itself.

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The Plaid Pterodactyl

By Geoff St. Reynard

Inviting the Scotchman for a visit was something of a problem; it seemed that he had a guest of his own—from a lost age

"IT'S CALLED *Recrudescence of Langsyne,*" Bill said hopefully to Lisabeth. "The monster swooping down on the plane is a Great Pterodactyl of the Jurassic. Prehistoric animal, you know. Dinosaur."

"Recrudescence," murmured Roger, backing off several yards and squinting at it with one eye shut. "Hmm, yes, not too bad. I see what you had in mind."

"I don't," said Lisabeth flatly.

Lisabeth entered the room after she heard the great tearing sounds, and she stared in amazement at the shattered wall—and the creature

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"Recrudescence: some dangerous influence popping up after a period of dormancy," Roger intoned, inching back toward the canvas as if it were waiting to bite him. "Right, old boy?"

"Yes," said Bill, glancing at Lisabeth's critical frown and registering the thought that it made her look adorable. "Notice the intensity of feeling in the lightning flash."

"Why did you make the clouds that ghastly chartreuse?" asked the girl.

"Well, it isn't what one sees I've put there, it's—"

"That's what the soul of a cloud looks like to Bill," interrupted Roger, peering over his thumb at the airplane in the painting. "I say, old man, what breed of ship is it? I've flown a multitude of weird-looking crates, but never a boat like that. You've put a B-29 tail on a Piper Cub fuselage, and if those white things are strut cuffs, they—"

"That's what the soul of a plane looks

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like to Bill," said Lisabeth. "But what's the idea behind it? Provided you had one, darling."

"The plane's only a symbol of civilization. The man and woman in it aren't conscious of the pterodactyl, you see, which stands for the crushing weight of accumulated forgotten aeons, about to —about to hit the plane," he finished lamely.

"I like your dinosaur," said Roger, and because Roger was an Englishman that was tantamount to pitching forward on his face with a screech of mad ecstasy. "The eyes remind me of Darrel Austin's lions. Not bad."

"They aren't supposed to remind you of Austin's lions," said the artist with some asperity. "They're supposed to be malignancy developed to the highest thinkable degree. Austin's lions have mellow, innocent, oh-what-a-bewildering-universe eyes."

"Ah," said Roger contritely. "Sorry, laddie."

The girl Lisabeth sat down on a handy bench, crossed her breath-taking legs and laid a scarlet-tipped finger against the loveliest lips in New York, while Bill's heart began hurling itself at his ribs like a caged cougar at the sound of the breakfast gong.

"Why did they ever award it second prize, I wonder?" she asked mildly. Bill's heart went back and lay down in a dark corner, snuffing quietly to itself, and the artist sighed. Once again he had come lumbering eagerly down the home stretch only to find that someone had removed the finish line and substituted a yawning abyss.

A MERE ten months ago, thought Bill Bartlett as he tottered back to the bench and collapsed beside her, a paltry ten months ago I was standing on this very spot, looking at my cubist canvas, *The Splash of the Merciless Oyster*. I was hanging on the ropes, groggy with the spectacle of my own genius, when Lisabeth sailed up on Roger's arm.

He stole a sidelong glance at her. "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken," thought Bill, more or less. She had reddish amber hair down to here, a complexion straight out of a Greuze portrait, a tipped-up Irish nose, and wide green feline eyes full of age-old sophistication. He'd never seen her before, but he wanted to see her again, and again, and again. . . .

"Who do you suppose painted that abomination?" the vision had asked her companion, and Bill, clutching his collar and gurgling, had introduced himself. Roger fused the fingers of his right hand together with a grip like a rock-crushing machine and said that he had always admired chaps who could paint and that he was Roger Keith-Brankham. Bill said the Third? and Roger said with surprise yes, Roger K.-B. the Third, how did he know? and Bill said as far as he knew it was a national trait and all Englishmen were the Third, and Roger, giving a constrained laugh, said this was Miss Kidd, and by that time Bill was so far gone that he came back with No Kidding? which got him off to a very feeble start indeed. They went out and had cocktails at one of the well-groomed local bars and discussed art. By the time Bill was staring down into the sunset glow of his fourth Golden Martini, philosophically nibbling on the olive, it hit him between the eyes that he was in love with this amber-tressed vision. And what, he asked himself, had he to offer her? Six foot two, eyes of blue, a snub nose and ears which would not have disgraced one of the larger species of Insect-Eating Bats, a smallish bank account and his artistic talents. Not an impressive array of qualifications, he admitted. Not when the ob-

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ject of his infatuation resembled one of the more aristocratic airbrush paintings in a man's magazine. About the only way to impress her, thought Bill, was to do something really socko. Along the Dali line, probably. More from the way she looked than from anything she said, Bill deduced that Lisabeth was rather the surrealistic type than the cubist type. So he rabbited home that evening and started work on his giant Daliesque canvas *Ashtray in Winter;* which Lisabeth, when it was hung, said should have been titled *Grant's Tomb in Convulsions.*

AFTER that he'd done a number of other pieces, by which she was alternately revolted and sent into hysterics. Romantically he was progressing about as fast as a rheumatic glacier when one day Roger asked him point-blank when he was going to stop acting like a spineless protozoa and propose to the girl.

Bill sneered. "What the blazes have I got to recommend me to a girl like Lisabeth?"

"Your art."

Bill laughed; it was a somber noise. "My art! She thinks it stinks," he said, evidently judging poetry more suited to this high tragedy than prose.

"Well, why don't you try something different? Landscapes or potraits, you know."

Bill gave the somber laugh an encore. "Leaping paintpots, man, you know Lisabeth. Was anybody ever more modern? More urbane? More—more New Yorkedly sophisticated? Ha!" he said, pushing the somber laugh out of the wings for a final curtain. "I can see myself doing a landscape. She'd give me the yak-yak so fast my ears would spin."

"She did that with *Emeralds in a Kangaroo's Pouch.* She said you should have framed your palette."

"Well, I've got one on the boil now that should open her eyes to the nobility of my soul. If she likes it I'm going to propose; if it flops I'm sunk without trace."

"Oh, come, old boy! You've got her all wrong. Besides, you're still a good-looking blighter."

Bill was sardonic. "If I sat down at your feet we'd look like Tyrone Power and Lassie." He stuck out his lower lip and frowned. "That's the crux of the matter. I think she goes for you."

Roger was staggered. "Oh, come. She regards me as an older brother."

"Somebody else's older brother, not hers."

"Good gad," husked Roger, staring wildly off-stage left and plucking at his moustache in a feverish manner. "But I'm a congenital bachelor. I don't want to have women in love with me."

"I do," said Bill moodily. "I want to have Lisabeth in love with me. And I'm putting my faith and hope in this present canvas. It's got a pterodactyl in it. A green pterodactyl," he added. "I stand or fall by my green pterodactyl."

And now, some weeks later, he seemed to have fallen with a remarkably nasty thud.

"PAIRDON me," said a voice, coming suddenly out of the void and sounding to Bill like a ripsaw doing an imitation of Sir Harry Lauder. "Pairdon me, but which o' these monsterusities is the Scottish peecture, *We Can Dispense Wi' Auld Lang Syne?"*

"That's *Putrescence of Langsyne,"* said Lisabeth.

"Recrudescence," corrected Bill irritably. "This is it."

The Scotch ripsaw reeled and would have fallen had it not clutched Bill's shoulder. "Yon muss?" it howled.

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"Yon scraggly, hideous, purple, slimy, blotch of a muss is a Scottish peecture? By the Black Douglas! I'll no believe it. Scotland hasna fallen that low yet. 'Tis some counterfeit to undermine morale."

"I painted it," muttered Bill, using his pipestem as a lever to pry the great red paw off his shoulder.

"Mon! Ye're a Scot?" asked the ripsaw, astounded.

"No," said Bill, staring ruefully at the two pieces of his favorite pipe.

"Weel—"

"It's not meant to be a Scotch picture," said Roger, valiantly trying to wedge his finger into this leaky conversational dyke.

The newcomer's face fell. It was a broad Scotch face, the shade and texture of maroon leather, trenched all over with lines and crinkles of dour gloom. Long clumps of fur burst from his careening ears and from the wide nostrils of his enormous nose. His eyes were two veritable Loch Lomonds, looking now as if they might overflow. He wore a plaid shirt barred with pea-green and scarlet; a riband of the same tartan was at his buttonhole, and atop his thick red shock of hair perched a tiny Glengarry bonnet, looking like a small boat in a tempestuous sea.

"I was lookin' forrard tae a Scots Peecture," he said in a voice that sounded now like a weary ripsaw eating oatmeal while someone played funeral marches upon the bagpipes in the background. He ambled over to Bill's canvas and stood before it, six feet three of knobbly brawn. "Ah," he murmured aloud, "a flying machine . . . a wee bit lopsided, too. A lightning flush. And a—great thundering bogles!" he howled, performing one of the more intricate steps of the sword dance. "Ye lairds and wee oatcakes! A Peter O'Dactel!"

The Englishman and the artist pricked up their ears.

"He recognizes it," said Roger with surprise.

"Yes, he does," agreed Bill with even more astonishment.

"Let's cultivate him," said Lisabeth, her eyes shining girlishly. "He's a character."

They hurried over and surrounded the plaid one. "You know what a pterodactyl is?" Bill queried.

"Aye, aye! I've got one at hame. Look at his wee tail a-skirlin' oot behind him!" cried the Scot, enraptured.

THE three stared automatically at the canvas. There was no doubt that Bill had done a nice job on the rocketing dinosaur; the great leathery wings, the enormously long tail ending in a flat diamond-shaped paddle, the clutching red claws, the ungainly neck and, worst of all the horror, the devilish head with its toothy six-foot jaws spread wide and its eyes glowing like coals just out of the fiery furnace. "What do you mean you've got one at—" began Bill absently.

"Yes, what do you—" said Roger and the girl together, both of them thinking of something else, and then there were three of the quickest double-takes in history. Bill's alone might have set a new record.

"You've got one at home?" shrieked Bill, causing an aged art critic three galleries off to jump and drop his catalogue.

"Aye, a dear wee creature. Look ye, mon," said the Scot, jabbing a hairy forefinger at the canvas, "ye've made his eyes too big by half. And they shouldna be red, they should be a mild and peaceful blue, like Lock Leven." He turned to Bill and nodded severely. "And ye've got his neck a mite short, too."

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"I've got his eyes—" hissed Bill.

"He's got his neck—" supplemented Roger.

"Aye," said the Scot, pursing his lips and looking as if he were Robert the Bruce laying down the law to a recalcitrant spider. "Did ye never see a Peter O'Dactel?"

Bill shook his head, feeling his brains begin to drip down along his spine. Roger was doing a very creditable imitation of an idiot goldfish. Lisabeth Kidd had backed off to the bench again to look for some handy blunt instrument. It made a pretty tableau. *Lunacy Among the Aesthetes.*

"Let's have it once again," snorted Bill, leaning up against the wall.

The Scot had turned to the painting and was examining the lower right-hand corner. "Are you W. Bairrtlett?" he asked Bill.

Bill said yes, he thought he was still W. Bartlett.

"Ma name's Thrip. Alastair Thrip of Stagslaughter Glen in Sco'land."

"I know Stagslaughter Glen," put in Roger, managing to get his jaw under control. "It's near Gramfarlain, isn't it?"

"Aye, not over far from Grramfurlain, and a lovely place. I wonder why I left it." He peered at the Englishman. "Ye'd be a Sassenach?"

"He would?" said Bill, hopelessly at sea.

"Yes, I'm English," assented Roger.

"You were telling us about this p-p-p-p," said Bill lucidly.

"The O'Dactel? I found him some weeks ago in a peetiable condeetion doon Battery way in the rain. So I tuk the puir wee beastie hame, and what wi' porridge and scones and healthful whuskey he's recuperatin' nicely."

"Who is?" asked Lisabeth, sidling back with a bronze statuette of the god Anubis swinging casually in her hand.

"The O'Dactel," said Roger.

"Aye," agreed Alastair, and a lugubrious sigh laden with the perfume of Highland stills was wafted along on the hushed gallery's air. "But I've got to move again, and where I'm to take him I canna tell." A tear stole out of one eye and began its hazardous descent of the craggy nose. "It's move, move, till a mon's near cross-eyes, aften in the middle o' the nicht; it's aye 'ye'll have to go, Muster Thrip, and tak' yer awful beast wi' ye,' and 'get yon munster oot o' ma hoose, ye dairty Scotsman,' and what with this thing and that there's nae rest for a puir mon. . . ." He wept unashamed.

"About the t-t-t-t," said Bill, adding practically nothing to the tone of the conversation.

LISABETH set down the god Anubis. She put a slim arm as far as it would go around the heaving shoulders of Alastair Thrip. "There, there," she cooed softly. "It's all right. You have some friends now to help you." She looked at Bill, who was pensively blowing bubbles. "Two sane friends and an artist," she added.

"The O'Dactel," Bill erupted, after several tries, "I mean the pterodactyl. You said you had one."

"A fine affectionate beastie," said the Scot, smiling through the tears. "Wi' a taste for gude scones."

"You mean you have a pterodactyl here, in New York, not a picture, not a statue, not a fossil, a pterodactyl, who eats scones, a pterodactyl?" yammered Bill, repeating the bubble routine.

"Wi' butter," added Alastair a trifle obscurely.

"But, old man," said Roger, "the last of these brutes died out about a million

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years ago, you know."

"Aye. That's why, when I saw the pretty thing a' huddled oop on the pier, talkin' tae itself, I couldna but take compassion on it. Only think how lonely it must be!"

"Gosh, that's right," said Roger thoughtfully. "I hadn't looked at it that way before."

"This pet of yours," interrupted Lisabeth, who wouldn't actually have recognized a pterodactyl if it had nipped her on the ankle, "you and he have to move out tonight?"

"Aye."

"And you haven't got a place to stay?"

"Aye, we havna."

"Bill's got a great big spare room he uses for his models," said the girl. "It even has a private bath. He wouldn't mind if you stayed there for a while."

"Who wouldna—who wouldn't?" gasped Bill.

"You wouldn't." She turned and gave him the full benefit of her wide cat's eyes. "Would you, dearest?"

"But he's got a whacking great O'Dactel with him," protested Bill faintly.

"What do you care if he and his pet use your spare room for a few nights? You can't see him put out on the streets. He's such a helpless-looking fellow."

Bill mutely ran his eye over the giant Scot's frame. It was quite a trip.

"I say, old boy," Roger put in, "he's a sort of compatriot of mine, I wish you'd put him up. I'll come and stay with you, too," he offered magnanimously.

Bill made a noise like an ailing puma who was not easy in its mind. "But he's a stark staring raving hatchet-murdering maniac!"

"For me," purred Lisabeth, making her lashes flicker. "Dear old Bill."

Bill touched a clammy tongue to sandpaper lips and wondered if his hands and feet would ever get warm again.

"Okay," he said to Alastair Thrip, with a hollow groan. "Collect your O'Dactel and we'll be going home."

"WHAT I can't understand," said Bill for the eighty-third time, "is why under the shining sun Lisabeth had to foist him off onto me. I mean, the man was so obviously demented. Talking about a pterodactyl."

"Well, he's certainly got something big in there," said Roger. "It rustles. I hear it walking around at night."

"I might wake up some noontime and find myself weltering in my gore," pursued Bill, waving his brush about wildly and splattering aquamarine paint over a pot of geraniums, Roger's tweed coat, and a half-finished canvas titled *Whither?* "But did she think of that when she blithely issued her invitations wholesale? I sometimes think she has a secret loathing for me," he said bitterly, mopping at Roger's coat with the tail of his smock, "that makes her do these things. As if she'd like nothing better than to see my shattered body stretched out on a slab in the morgue. A cold, grey, stone slab," he finished, giving another wild wave of the brush and narrowly missing Roger's left eye with a large aquamarine dollop.

"Oh, come, it was the mother in her. It was a kind, generous gesture. She couldn't bear to see him weeping."

"The mother in her!" Bill unleashed a somber laugh, on which he'd been putting a great deal of practice lately. "How can you use the term without blushing? She's one of society's sleek, frigid harpies, seeking out whom she may destroy," said he, adopting the style of the minor prophets.

"Come, laddie," protested Roger.

"A cold, polished, heartless idol of

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the idle rich," went on Bill, warming to it. "She lives but for the applause of the sophisticated throng. Mother. Ha! A cynical, shallow spoilt darling of—"

"Come, come, old crumpet, you're not playing King Lear. What's wrong? Did she turn you down?"

"No," said Bill moodily. "You know I haven't asked her yet. I'm scared."

There was a crash from Alastair's room. The two young men turned and regarded the door thoughtfully.

"Let's take a peek through the keyhole," suggested Bill.

"Not quite cricket," demurred Roger. They rose casually. It was a dead heat.

"Great Godfrey, this is a tremendous keyhole," whispered the Englishman. "Looks as if someone had been working on it with a file. You could shove your fist through it."

"My models used to change in there," muttered Bill abstractedly. "It got dull, just sitting out here waiting. . . . Do you see anything?"

"Something plaid.. It keeps swishing by."

"I see it. Maybe he's dancing."

"Hsst! Listen."

THERE was a preliminary whine, a doleful keening wail, and then with a full-throated boom and screech Alastair Thrip's bagpipe gave tongue.

"Whaddaya see now?" shouted Bill in his friend's ear.

"The tartan's still whipping past. Can this man of miracles play the pipes and dance at the same time?"

"That doesn't look like a kilt. More complicated."

"I swear I saw a wing. But it was red and green striped, and if it *was* a wing, it was about fourteen feet long."

"Oh, foof," said Bill. "Let's go in. It's been two weeks now and we haven't so much as asked to see the thing." He banged on the door. The bagpipe stopped with a protesting gurgle.

"Aye?" said the voice of Alastair Thrip.

"May we come in?"

"Joost a minute, I'll let ye in a tick." They heard, rather muffled, a cajoling voice: "Coom, pretty Peter, coom, wee bairn, get in there, won't ye, like a gude lad?" A loud crash. "Aarrgh, ye blasted scunner, wull ye noo?" A prolonged scratching noise. "There, ye'll hae no porridge for supper the nicht!" A slam and footsteps. "Coom in," said the Scot. "Sit ye doon, gentlemen, sit ye doon. Verra cauld for November, is it no? Can I offer ye a drop of Auld Scotia's Pride? Kindly excuse the ring in the glasses. I havna had time tae wash up today. Ye wadna dilute it wi' *water*? Ah, that's gude."

Bill gazed around the disordered room, his eyes flooding as the whiskey took hold of his tonsils and wove them into a lover's knot. "Where's Peter?"

"Och, I shut him intae the bathroom. He's not over partial to strangers."

"Tell him I'm no stranger, I'm his landlord. We'd like a look at him."

There was a sudden death-rattle from the corner which caused Bill to leap like a touched-up frog, but it was only the last querulous complaint of the bagpipe. Alastair rose.

"Weel, since it's you, I think we might joost open the door a wee crack." They all went over and stood beside the door and the Scot slowly pulled it open. It was dark in the bathroom, too dark for them to make out anything clearly; but they could smell a parched, hot smell, like great wastes of arid sand and horned toads and little dry-skinned lizards sunning themselves on baking rocks. There came a small rustle. Alastair closed the door abruptly.

"He says, wull ye shut that dommed door, I willna see veesitors the nicht."

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"That's that," said Roger regretfully. "You can't argue with a Peter O'Dactel."

"Especially since I painted him t' other day," agreed the Scotsman. "He's verra proud and haughty."

Bill experienced the old familiar sensation. "Painted?" he said, hanging to Roger's arm and drawing little designs on the carpet with his toes.

"He was green, which is a dairty Irish colour, and when I'd play the pipes and he'd dance aboot, wi' his wings folded roond him like a kilt, I'd think to mysel', ah, lad, if ye were only a gude Scottish plaid! So I borrowed a couple o' chubes o' your paint, Wulliam, and spent a day worrkin' on him—and him as patient as any lamb, bless his hairt. I painted him the plaid of my ain clan, the bonnie Thrip tartan. Ah, mon, he's a grrand sight!"

"I'll bet he is," said Roger, supporting Bill from the room.

"WHERE'S Alastair?" asked Lisabeth, as she came in and threw her mink jacket across the bed. She was semi-dressed in something of silver and grey held up, apparently, by a diamond clip and a childlike disbelief in the law of gravity.

"In his room. The O'Dactel's indisposed."

"His pet? What a shame." She studied the canvas on Bill's easel. "What in heaven's name is *this* one?"

"*Whither,*" said Bill, tearing his eyes from the dress with a distinct ripping sound.

"Thither," said Lisabeth. "This thing here."

"*Whither,*" repeated Bill, giving his eyes their head.

"Well, look where I'm looking, you idiot. This one."

"It's called *Whither,*" said Roger helpfully.

"Oh." She began wandering around the room. "What's wrong with his animal?"

"We're not even sure it is an animal," said the artist balefully. "He may be hiding Three-Gun MacSnatch in there. It's been two weeks and we haven't seen any more of it than we can make out through the keyhole. We asked to see it a couple of hours ago but it was sulking in the bathroom, and now he says it's unwell."

"If he's got a sick animal on his hands, he'll need help." She strode purposefully across the room and before the two horrified young men could stop her, had turned the knob and walked in.

"My gosh," said Bill, folding up on the sofa. "What a cast-iron copper-bottomed nerve."

"I told you," said Roger. "It's the mother instinct at work again."

For several minutes they fluctuated uneasily between the door and the couch, and then Lisabeth reappeared, closing the door behind her with a small frown.

"Well?" said Bill.

"What is it?" asked Roger.

"What's what?"

"What sort of beast has he got in there?"

"Oh! I didn't see it. It was in the bathroom, eating soap. From what he tells me," said the girl, looking grave, "I'd say it was going to have a baby."

Bill made a valiant attempt to touch the ceiling with the top of his skull. "No!" he screamed. "Absolutely no! I forbid it! I won't have *two* unknown whatsits in there. No!"

"I told him what to do for it," said Lisabeth. "But not being able to see it, I—"

"You told him what to do for it?" repeated Roger incredulously.

"Certainly. He described the symptoms, I prescribed the cure."

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"The poor thing'll probably expire in a puff of pink smoke," said Bill ironically, letting his eyes follow their natural bent back to the grey and silver dress once more.

"Don't be ridiculous," said Lisabeth sharply. "The symptoms were just the same as—my gosh!" she exclaimed suddenly, struck with an abrupt thought, "that's right! I'll bet it's an egg!"

"Aye," said Alastair, popping out of his room like a plaid genie out of a bottle of Scotch. "Aye, it's an egg. Joost look here!"

They whirled and gawked. On his outstretched palms—on both of them—lay a vast brownish-white leathery ovoid. It was at least a foot and a half long.

"Ma wee Peter is a mother," said the Scot proudly. "I've changed his name tae Patreecia."

BILL approached and cautiously, reluctantly, prodded the great brown-white thing that nestled in Alastair's hands. "It might be an egg at that," he admitted. He whirled around to Lisabeth. "How the devil did you know what to do for the—the beast?" he asked, a strange wild light dawning in his eyes.

"I've had enough practice at home," said Lisabeth, looking surprised.

There was a whirring, pounding racket from the Scot's room, followed by the most spectacular screech any of them had ever heard. The walls began to shake and quiver.

"Sounds like a turkey-gobbler beating his wings," said Lisabeth calmly. "I'll bet your fowl is feeling pretty chipper again."

"Turkey-gobbler!" said Bill, dancing a miniature fox-trot and rumpling his hair. "Practice with eggs! I thought you were a New Yorker."

"Until year before last," said Lisabeth, "I lived on a farm in Ohio."

"He wants to go hame," said Alastair.

"Who does?" asked Roger, trying to listen to Lisabeth, Bill, Alastair and the Screech all at once.

"Patreecia. He says, now that's done, shall we be off tae Sco'land?"

"You're going back to Scotland?" asked Roger.

"Aye. We've been waitin' for Peter—pairdon me, Patreecia—to feel a bit more lively. Oh, laddie, for one wee oatcake!" he shouted joyously. "One honest Scottish scone! To toss a long caber and stalk a fine stag! Ah, the mists and the fogs! Goodbye to ye," he said suddenly, gripping Roger's hand warmly. "We must be off; I willna waste a' that energy," he jerked his thumb at the door of his room, which was slowly coming off the hinges. "Farewull, Wulliam. Farewull, lassie. Ye were a grreat help. I'll write ye a postal card frae Glasga." He shook hands all round and vanished, humming "The hills o' the Highlands are callin' me hame."

Bill blinked rapidly a couple of times, said "So long" to the door, and turned back to Lisabeth.

"You said a farm?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"But your face—your—your figure?"

"What about them?" asked Lisabeth in some dismay.

"I—oh, nothing." He sank down into the couch's depths. "Lemme think a minute." He grasped her by the wrist and hauled her down beside him. "Don't go 'way."

"How's he going home?" asked Roger of the room at large. "He'll never get that Noise on a boat."

For a moment the tumult abated, and he heard Alastair saying: "Coom, pretty Patreecia, coom lad, I mean lassie,

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get yer great wing oot o' my way; noo, steady, wait till I'm settled, ye booby . . . ah, there. Noo, up for a' you're worrth. Stir yerself, lass! Awa', awa'!"

There was a mournful honk as he gave a preliminary squeeze to his bagpipes; then a scuffle and a crash that brought Roger bursting into the room. The place was empty. The single window gaped black and vacant, its frame half torn away, and the chill night air was rushing in. Roger flung himself at the hole in the wall and stood shivering, his eyes searching the heavens. He thought he could still hear the faint squawl of the pipes, but he could see nothing, and after a while he was turning into the room again when across the face of the near-full moon he saw a small object go flitting. It was far away. It might have been a bat, or, because he glimpsed it only with the tail of his eye, it might have been a distant airplane. It looked a bizarre sort of thing. When he focused on it, it was gone. From far below arose the traffic noises, mingled with the vulgar curses of someone who had just received half a window frame on the top of his head.

"BUT listen," Bill was saying to Lisabeth, "if you're from a farm, where in blazes did you pick up all that sophistication?"

"All what sophistication?" asked the girl.

"Why, why—all *that* sophistication," exclaimed the artist, pointing an emotional finger at the grey and silver dress.

"I picked it up in a shop," said Lisabeth, slightly bewildered. "Where do you suppose I'd pick it up?"

"Be quiet a minute," said Bill again. "I've got to think this out."

"If anyone cares," said Roger, taking his coat and hat, "I'm leaving."

"Bye-bye," said Lisabeth, waving her free hand at him.

"I may be going a pretty fairish distance," went on the Englishman, "and I'd like to ask a favor of you. If you don't hear from me for a week, pack up my things and send them to my mother. I'll be there when they arrive."

"I'll see that he does it," said Lisabeth.

"I have a great yearning to see the cropped turf of Oxford again," mused Roger aloud, his hand on the front door knob. "I want to stroll down Fleet Street and through Chelsea, and enjoy a game of darts and a beer at a certain jolly little pub I happen to know of. There's a girl in Devon I want to kiss once more before I die." He opened the door. "It came over me so beastly sudden. This longing, I mean. I doubt that I could stand the crawling days on a liner, and you know what plane reservations are these days."

He grinned lopsidedly at the girl. "I think I'll stroll down toward the Battery. It's beginning to snow. I love to walk in the snow."

"Don't catch cold," said Lisabeth.

"I shan't. But who knows what else I'll catch?" He gave her a final brief wave of the hand. "Who knows what a man may find on the Battery piers?" he asked softly. "They tell me that every creature has, somewhere, a mate."

"LOOK here," said Bill, breaking a long silence. "I've been under a false impression."

"Have you, dear?" said Lisabeth, looking into his eyes.

"Yes. Laboring under a misapprehension. I thought—you see, your face, and all, and those eyes—look here, Lisabeth," he said, leaping to his feet, yanking *Whither* off the easel, and dropping it behind the radiator, "I'm going to paint a landscape. I think I'll start tonight. Want to stay and watch?"

"What, a green sky over a turquoise

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meadow, with an oblong pink-and-yellow moon? No, thank you."

"No, no," said Bill, gathering up brushes and tubes and palette cups. "A green field with a red barn and, in the middle distance, cows."

"Zigzag cows?"

"Jersey cows," said Bill sternly.

"But you can't paint anything like that without a model."

"I can too. I can paint it from memory," said Bill. "I come from Freeport, Pennsylvania."

"And do you think you could paint a cow so that it didn't look like a pain in the gastric juices?"

"I could paint a cow that would win a blue ribbon at a state fair," said Bill proudly.

"Darling!" said Lisabeth, flinging herself into his arms.

"Sweetheart!" cried Bill, erupting palette knives and linseed oil bottles all over the place. "Will you marry me?"

"Great lairds and wee oatcakes," exclaimed Lisabeth coyly. "Aye."

They embraced warmly. Bill looked over her shoulder.

"Say, there's that gigantic egg. What'll we do with it?"

"Put it in the oven."

"Do you want it hard-boiled or scrambled?"

"Neither. Put it in the oven and turn the fire very low, and in a month or so —who knows?" She flickered her long lashes down over her nice, green unsophisticated, country-girl eyes. "We might want to fly over to Cairo for the honeymoon."

Instrument Robot

☆ By Leslie Phelps ☆

AMAZING Stories has carried a lot of material on modern robots and has frequently spoken of automatic processes which seem to be so common today. The question arise; generally speaking, how is it that these gadgets work? What does automatic control do?

From the broadest standpoint we can generally think of an automatic machine or process in this light. A machine is doing work. A small portion of this work is amplified, controlled, taken from the apparatus and fed back to govern the machine.

Usually the work or energy is taken from the process in the form of an electrical voltage or a current which is so easily handled and manipulated by modern instrumentation techniques. Consider for example something so basic and common as a representative example of automatic control, the heating of a building. Here, the basic element is a sensitive thermostat.

The thermostat is nothing more, usually, than a bimetallic strip which changes a dimension with a change of temperature. In the newer heating systems, this has been done away with and instead of utilizing a mechanical change, a resistance wire whose resistance changes with temperature is used to modulate the control system.

In any event, the variation in current caused by the thermostat actually controls the operation of the blower motor which in turn controls the intensity of the flame in the heating system.

Now that example is extremely crude. When one considers a refined system such as is used in machine tool work, the robot-like nature of automatic control becomes apparent.

The pantographic machinery which uses a tracer to follow a pattern, the tracer producing a voltage which controls one or more machines, is a magnificent example of the newer methods. No matter how complex the original pattern, the tracer manages to follow it with ease, and the powerful electrically driven tools, in turn, follow the pantographic tracer's orders.

Almost always, the controlling device like a photocell, a generator, a thermopile, produces some recognizable sort of electrical signal. This makes for simplicity. Electrical signals, no matter how complex, may be amplified, and applied to the work at hand.

It wasn't so very long ago that industrial plants looked with disdain on these "gadgets" as they contemptuously referred to them, but now the word "gadget" contains a special significance and is almost said with affection.

Without them, modern industry would not be able to do as it does now—eliminate the human error. Photocells don't get tired, relays never sleep, thermostats are always ready.

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CHECKMATE to DEMOS

By H. B. Hickey

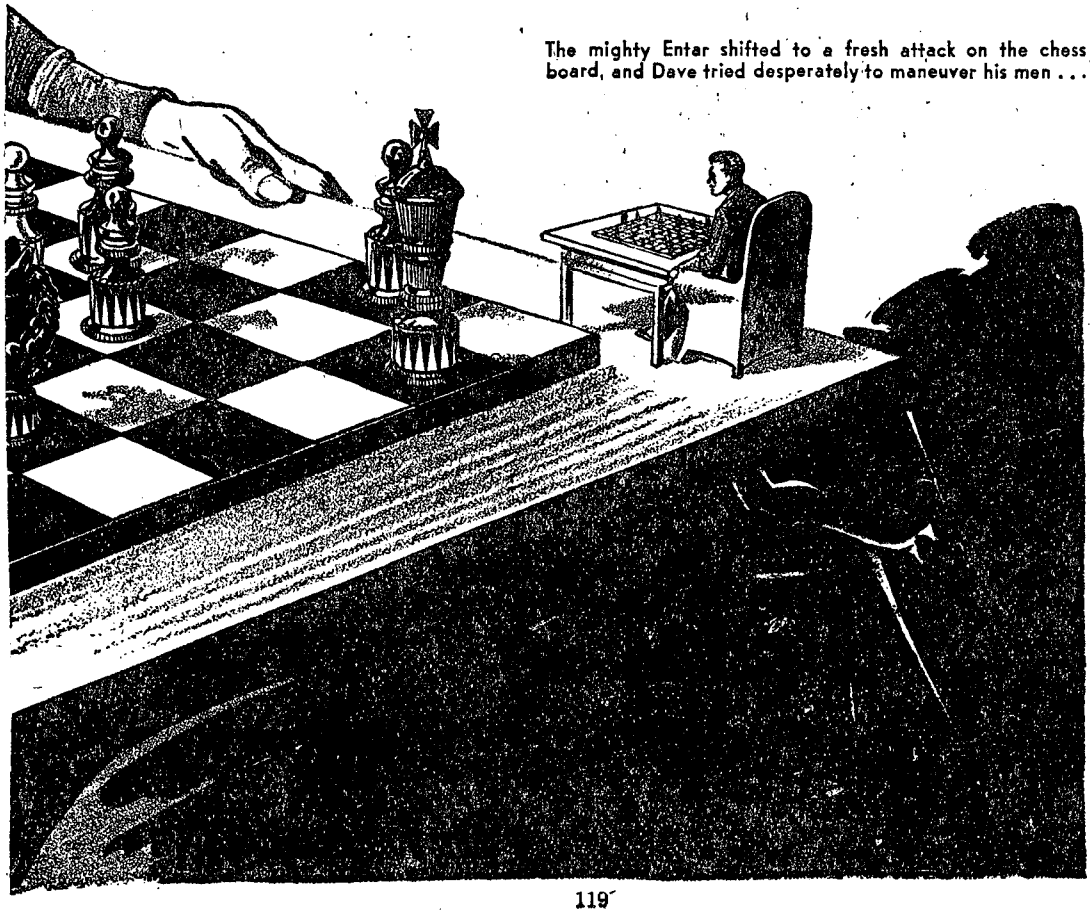
Dave had to win the chess game—for if he lost, the Earth would be destroyed . . .

"YOUR move," said Entar, Gardook of Demos, a sly smile on his face.

Fenir, Gardook of Tamuz, stared balefully at the enormous checkerboard before him, then turned to Blatt in a silent plea for help. But the Gardook of Nisan had none to offer.

They sat thus, the three lords of the three sister worlds, each intent on the two-foot squares of stone in the great gaming board. Two of Fenir's four hands toyed tentatively with a couple of pieces on the board while with his other hands he drummed a tattoo.

But no amount of thought was going to help Fenir. No matter which pieces he moved, or which way he moved



The mighty Entar shifted to a fresh attack on the chess board, and Dave tried desperately to maneuver his men . . .

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them, there were always Entar's pieces to sweep them from the board.

"All right," Fenir said at last. "I give up. You win."

He tossed across the board a necklace that had the radiance of a dozen suns. When the Gardooks played they played for stakes that were worthy of the lords of planets. And when a Gardook lost he paid gracefully.

Fenir shoved his chair away from the board and rose and stretched himself to his full height, which was slightly more than eighteen feet. His great mouth opened in a yawn that would have seemed vulgar in a commoner.

"Tired?" Entar asked. He carelessly stuffed the necklace in his pocket.

"Fenir is always tired when he loses at kven," Blatt grinned.

"True," Entar said. "But I thought you'd both stay for some dvina after the game."

At mention of the royal vintage of Demos, Fenir's eyes brightened momentarily. It seemed that he might succumb to the lure. But then he shook his head and stifled another yawn.

"No, I'd better not. Really. You know, it's not all kven and dvina being a Gardook. There are problems of state to face every day, and that takes a clear head. Believe me."

Entar and Blatt broke into good-natured peals of laughter.

"And he always pleads affairs of state when he loses at kven," Blatt said. "Tell the truth, Fenir, and admit you're a bad loser."

"Not at all," Fenir said, knowing he was pinned down.

He made a grand gesture. "But after all, you can't expect me to keep my interest awake with the sort of stakes we play for."

"What?" Entar gasped. "Did I hear you right?"

"Certainly." It was said with all the dignity Fenir could muster.

Entar and Blatt were staring at him with mouths agape. Then slowly, a joyous smile spread across Entar's face. All four of his hands beckoned to Fenir.

"Well," Entar said. "Well! Now you're talking my language. When it comes to a sporting proposition the Gardook of Demos takes a back seat to no one. Name your stakes and let's get at it."

"Oh, you know he was just talking," Blatt said.

IF THERE had been a chance that Fenir would back down, Blatt had ended it. Fenir glared at him, then plumped down into his chair and pulled it up to the board.

"For a man who never gambles, you do a lot of talking yourself," he said sourly.

"Come, come," Entar said. He was already arranging his pieces, his four hands darting swiftly about the board.

"Tell you what," he suggested. "I'll give you three marbas handicap and play you for Tamuz."

"Hold on," Blatt interrupted. He knew what a foolish wager could lead to. "Besides, the law prohibits that. A Gardook can't give up his realm."

"Always the spoil-sport," Entar grunted. The Gardook of Demos had a cruel streak in his nature and he sometimes disliked this Blatt, with his kind and thoughtful ways.

"Think of something big," Entar urged Fenir. "Anything. I'll snap it up so fast it'll take your breath away."

Fenir was stumped. He had put himself in a bad spot and he didn't like it at all. He could not think of anything of unusual value he cared to risk against Entar, who was considered the greatest kven player of the three planets. Fenir searched for a way out.

"Something of tremendous value," he

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mused, as though to himself. "But something not prohibited by law. I really can't think of a thing."

"Well, I can," Entar said. "It fits this delicate case as though made for it. Your astronomers discovered a likely looking little planet the other day, didn't they?"

"So?"

"I hear it's rich in radioactive minerals. That makes it very valuable. But I'm sure you haven't yet claimed ownership of it for Tamuz. And that means it isn't yet part of your realm. So you can gamble it away without breaking the law. Right?"

"I guess so," Fenir muttered. Then he brightened. "But I can't think of anything you own that's of equal value."

"You underestimate me. If you win you get my own secret formula for dvina, plus the services of my own head brewer for a period of five years!"

Fenir's mouth dropped, and even Blatt was aghast. They knew that Entar would rather lose two or his arms then the sole ownership of that precious dvina of Demos which was his pride and joy.

"That certainly is sporting," Blatt said. "If not for my vow I'd be tempted to risk something of my own for a share of that formula."

Now Fenir's eyes glittered. This was worth shooting for. He swept three of Entar's marbas from the board and hunched forward. "My move first?" he asked, eager for every advantage.

"You move first," Entar said magnanimously.

After due deliberation Fenir pushed a marba forward two squares. Entar countered with a like move. Fenir advanced another marba, playing it safe.

Now Entar showed why he was acknowledged a true master of kven. Lacking three of his first line pieces, he could not afford to play safe and trade one for one. He began to bring up his big pieces for slashing attack.

"Teva to Gardook's Blen three." He moved the heavy piece one square forward and one sidewards.

Fenir, still playing it safe, advanced another marba. Entar slid a Blen, a tall, graceful piece, in a slashing move across the board.

DESPERATELY Fenir tried to form his more numerous pieces into a solid wall of defense. But Entar gave him no chance. By the sixth move Entar was brilliantly shifting a Blen to his Teva five. Fenir was forced to bring his second piece out of the back line. His Gardoona, with her black crest, went up to the space his Blen had vacated. Entar moved a marba and Fenir took it with a Teva.

"Blen to Gardook's Teva five!" Entar chortled. Blatt said, "Brilliant!"

From there on it became a rout. Fenir was allowed to have the momentary pleasure of taking a big piece with a marba, and then found that Entar had by his sacrifice bottled up Blena and Gardoona. In order to protect his Gardook Fenir had to give up both Tevas. But Entar was already after the Gardoona.

"Blen to Gardoona three," Fenir said.

"Teva to Blen six!"

Now both Gardook and Gardoona were under direct attack. Fenir searched wildly for a way to create an impasse which would end the game with a tie. He was too late. With a growl he swept his remaining pieces off the board, admitting defeat.

"All right," he said. "The new planet is yours."

Entar made him a mock bow of thanks.

"What do you intend to do with it now that you've won it from Fenir?"

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Blatt asked the Gardook of Demos.

"The usual thing, I suppose. First have it ray-blasted thoroughly as a sanitary measure, and then send in robot crews to work the radioactive lodes."

He frowned at Blatt, whose forehead was furrowed. "What the deuce are you pondering now?"

"Well, I admit the necessity of ray-blasting for reasons of sanitation. But what if the place is inhabited?"

"Inhabited? Certainly it's inhabited. With vermin and disease carrying beasts, like every other place we've ever taken over!"

"You know what I mean," Blatt said. "What if there are beings there who are intelligent? Like us. The first blast would wipe them out. That would be murder!"

"What a philosopher," Fenir groaned. "He thinks of things that have never in history come up, and are not likely to arise now."

"Nevertheless," Blatt persisted, "according to our laws about the killing of sentient beings . . ."

"The odds against it are a sextillion to one," Entar said.

"Even so . . . The possibility exists, however remote."

"All right! All right!" Entar thundered. "In deference to our friend's conscience I will first have the planet scouted. And I will order it done at once. Satisfactory?"

"Perfectly," Blatt smiled. "Now how about some of that dvina?"

DAVE HARKNESS looked down a long line of empty tables and chairs and then scowled at his opponent. They were going to be the last to finish. Binky would be on needles and pins by now, and Ellen would be raging because her evening paper was late.

If not for the fact that it was a breach of etiquette, Dave would have asked his opponent why the devil he didn't move. Couldn't he see that he'd lost? But at last his opponent was coming out of his reverie. His lips moved as he shifted a piece.

"King to Bishop one."

"Rook to Queen two," Dave said, and suited the action to the word.

The other man spread his hands in defeat.

"I resign. Good game, Mr. Harkness."

Dave didn't even take the time to thank him. Before he could leave the tournament hall he had to get a complete record of every game that had been played that night. Then he had to find out who his next opponent would be.

Only when all those things had been done did he start home. On the way he stopped for a sandwich and a cup of coffee. At a convenient newsstand he picked up Ellen's paper.

He had been right about Ellen. After hanging up his hat and coat, Dave took the paper into the living room. Ellen glowered at him.

"About time!" She let him give her a peck on the cheek and then opened the paper to her favorite comics.

"Your lord and master is waiting for you," she said over the rustle of the pages.

Her remark had been unnecessary. Already Binky's strident voice was calling down the stair well. "Dave!"

Dave ran for the stairs and took them two at a time up to the floor above. If he didn't hurry Binky would have another attack. And that meant more doctors and more bills. Then Dave was at the bedroom door and stepping inside. He caught sight of Binky. As always, at that first glimpse, Dave sucked in a quick, shallow breath.

That thing on the bed, that thing that

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had once been a man, that grotesquery without arms or legs, that gargoyle face; that was Dave Harkness's handiwork!

Once Dave had been a happily married man, possessed of a pretty wife and a good job and many friends. And then, on a clear dry summer night, it had happened.

There had been dancing and laughter and a good many drinks. Afterward there was the urge to go for a drive, and the feeling of power that came when his foot went all the way down on the accelerator and the big car hurtled along the road. And then the panic that swept over him when he saw the other automobile pull out of the side road and knew that he could not stop in time.

Out of the wreckage of the other car they had dragged a thing that a few minutes before had been a human being. That life still lingered in the crushed and mangled fragment of a man was a miracle.

The doctors said there was no hope. They were wrong. With unbelievable tenacity that pitiful creature had clung to life, and willed himself to live, and *had* lived. That was Binky.

It could have meant the end of Dave's hopes for a future. It might even have meant prison for him. He was willing to accept those. But his insurance company had something to say about it. They refused to pay Binky's claim. Somehow, they discovered that his car had been on the wrong side of the road.

Dave had felt a moment of relief. Then he had gone to the hospital to see Binky, and he had found that he could not bring himself to tell him. Instead, Dave had offered to take Binky into his home, to care for him as long as he lived. It seemed little enough to do for this man from whom he had taken arms and legs, to whom he had left only a mind and a will to live.

ELLEN had unwillingly accepted the situation. For a long time she and Dave were nurse and servant to Binky. They installed him in the master bedroom. They did everything in their power to make him comfortable. They became his hands and feet. Binky was a tyrant and they were his slaves. But that was not enough for Binky. One night he had called Dave.

"Sit down, Harkness. Here, on the bed, next to me." Binky's voice was shrill and his black eyes followed Dave's every movement.

"You know, Harkness," he continued, "I almost feel sorry for you. Does that surprise you? You took away my limbs; in place of them you've practically given me your own. You would gladly change places with me if you could."

"Gladly," Dave said softly.

"Yes. But there was one thing I valued more than life itself. I had a dream, Harkness. And just as you must perform the acts of my own limbs, Harkness, just so will you fulfill my dream for me."

"I don't . . ." Dave began. Binky stopped him with a curse.

"Listen. I'm going to tell you about my dream, about the one thing that occupied my thoughts always, about the dearest thing you took from me:

"I was going to become the greatest chess player in the world! Not just *one* of the greatest, Harkness, but the very best of them all. And I would have done it. All my life I have practiced and studied.

"Do you know what I do when you and your precious wife are not around? I close my eyes and play chess with myself! I pretend I am playing the great masters. And I defeat them just

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as surely as if I were playing them in reality. No man lives who knows more about chess than I do. No man lives who has my *mind*.

"But I will never be able to play a real match! You can't realize what that thought did to me, how it ate into me like acid, just as the acid from my car battery ate into my face. To think that I could never play a match, never enter a tournament.

"And then I thought of you, Harkness. Through you I'm going to make my dream come true."

"But I don't even know how to play," Dave protested.

"You'll learn. When you turn on the light you'll see cases of books that came today. They're chess books. And there's a board."

"But suppose I have no knack for the game? I may never be as good as you."

"I don't expect you to. It's impossible. But you don't have to be that good. That's where my plan comes in. When you have a great mind like mine you can solve any problem."

And he really *had* solved it, Dave thought now as he let out his breath and stepped into the room. The solution had seemed as impossible as Binky's dream, but it had worked. If I told the tournament officials, Dave thought, they wouldn't believe me.

"He played even slower than I said he would," was Binky's greeting. "But you won."

"Yes, I won."

"In twenty-three moves?"

"In precisely twenty-three moves, each one of them exactly as you planned it."

DAVE'S voice was dull. For two years now there had always been the same questions and answers. One year Binky had spent teaching him the fundamentals of chess. It had turned out that Dave had little talent for the game; but under Binky's tutelage he had become a better than average player. Then Binky had made him join a chess club.

During the next two years Dave had played several games each evening at the club, and each evening he had brought home a record of the games for Binky to analyze. Dave had begun to win his games; when the sectional eliminations for the national tournament began, he had been chosen to represent the club.

"Let's have those scores," Binky said. "Who's your opponent for tomorrow?"

"Fellow names Lensinger," Dave said. He sorted out the transcript of Lensinger's game of that evening and held it up so Binky could read it.

"What a fool the man is," Binky grated. "Second only to the man he beat. Listen to this, starting at move twenty: Bishop to Knight three, Queen to Pawn, King to Queen two, Pawn to King's Rook five."

"What about it?" Dave asked.

"Good grief, Harkness, that's exactly the game Philidor and Captain Smith played in London in March, 1790! And Lensinger's opponent let himself be taken just as Smith did. You can look it up."

Dave didn't bother to look it up. He knew Binky would not be wrong. His mind was truly phenomenal; he could recall instantly any game he had ever seen or read. And he had read, or made Dave read to him, every important game to date.

"There's only one man in this sectional worth playing," Binky said. "That's Morton. Three years ago he beat Mike Finn, the Irish master, and he once played Sazonoff to a draw. But let's get on to Lensinger. Take this down."

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For an hour his voice droned on. If Lensinger had White, Dave was to play a Sicilian Defense. If Dave moved first he was to play a King's Bishop opening. In either case Binky could plot out Lensinger's probable line of play.

"This fellow has no initiative. It will be straight stuff. I've given you the line of attack. On the seventeenth move you'll take his Bishop with your Queen and he'll find he's bottled up his own Queen with his pawns. On the nineteenth move he'll resign."

For a moment Binky's eyes lost their brightness and he sighed heavily. Dave put a water glass to his mouth and he took a few sips.

"All right. Now let's take the other games tonight."

Dave took up the sheaf of scores and began to read rapidly; names of players and progressions of games came in a swift stream of words. But fast as he read he knew that Binky's mind was recording every syllable.

"That's all," Dave said at last. "Got it?"

"Of course. God! Everybody calls himself a chess player! Take that fellow Granz, the third game you read. You'll probably play him. He considers himself a follower of Capablanca, but he's picked up only Capablanca's weaknesses."

Dave shrugged and got up to leave. He know Granz and knew that to everyone but Binky the man would have been a fine player. Yet, when the time came, Binky's genius acting through Dave would crush Granz. And Morton would go down to defeat too. There was no doubt left in Dave's mind that Binky would realize his dream.

"Better go now," Binky said. "My heart is starting to act up."

Dave wondered how bad Binky's heart really was. Ellen said Binky was faking, but then she hated him.

Now Binky would go to sleep, probably to dream of future games. But for Dave there would be no sleep for hours. He had to stay awake until he had memorized the next night's play, as planned by the monster he himself had created.

ENTAR was in a jovial mood.

"So you finally got here," he said as Blatt entered the room. Behind Blatt came Fenir, and Entar's smile grew more expansive.

"Fenir too! Excellent. I was afraid you wouldn't be able to come."

"What's the occasion?" Fenir asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," Blatt grumbled. "Entar's message brought me away from an interesting experiment."

"Don't worry," Entar grinned. "This will keep you interested enough. My scouting expedition to that new planet I won has just returned. And since Blatt was the cause of the expedition I wanted him to hear the report. You too, Fenir. You'll get a chuckle out of hearing about Blatt's intelligent beings."

The Gardook of Demos clapped his hands twice and an instant later a young man in the uniform of the Gardook's personal staff entered the room.

"I've read this, of course," Entar said in an aside. "But I don't mind hearing it again. Go ahead, Kresan."

The young man drew from a case he carried a sheaf of reports and began to read:

"Our party, consisting of twelve ships and a thousand men, left Demos on the nineteenth day of Ooyar, our destination the new planet X. We reached our goal on the sixtieth day of the same period and hovered in space for preliminary survey.

"The planet, as reported, is comparatively minute. Intense radioactivity

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was noticed, apparently a result of some sort of eruptions. Noting nothing untoward, we ventured closer and effected a landing on the sixty-first day.

"Our first landing was made on a body of liquid, thickly stocked with low forms of marine life. Proceeding from that point, we cruised to land and came down under cover of darkness, as our instruments showed activity below. Our choice of site was fortunate, as it turned out that we had landed near a large center of population."

Kresan paused for breath and Entar said, "Now the fun starts. Continue."

"The planet is infested with vermin of all types, most of them disease carriers. There is also a variety of four footed creatures. However, the dominant species resembles ourselves somewhat, walking erect on two legs; but due to various ray bombardments have developed only two arms and hands, and being also of puny size.

"In the opinion of our scientists it is this lack of auxiliary arms which has hindered the development of the species and caused it to remain at a low level.

"Our first task was to scale ourselves down to size. This we did, having brought equipment to meet all contingencies. Then we ventured abroad.

"The planet is called Earth by its inhabitants. It is divided into a great number of separate principalities, each of which seems to be constantly at war with its neighbors. We had landed in one of the largest of these principalities. We found there a representative collection of the different races of Earth, but they are hardly distinguishable except by color and body configuration.

"However, such minor differences are given what seems undue importance to an impartial observer.

"THE inhabitants, in great part, live tightly packed into cities. Since transportation is exceedingly primitive the cities are filled with noxious vapors given off by vehicles. A particular sort of vehicle is so worshipped by the populace that its sale and use is uncontrolled, although hundreds of thousands are killed and mangled yearly beneath its wheels. Disease is rampant, filth is found everywhere. The inhabitants exist by means of robbery, the victims being each other. The chief robbers are acclaimed and honored.

"Several principalities, it is true, among them the one in which we landed, have made persistent attempts to control the aggressive and destructive tendencies of individual persons. Little success is apparent.

"Freedom is everywhere worshipped as a god, and nowhere to be found. True distinction is greeted with ridicule, its possessor often destroyed. All manner of strange religions and rites exist; inanimate objects and long dead beings are invested with holiness."

"Enough!" Blatt cried. "This is the worst yet."

"Unbelievable," Fenir said. "Our prehistoric ancestors were far advanced over these creatures."

"Wait. You haven't heard the worst," Entar told them. "Read on, Kresan."

"Poverty is more than common; in fact, for the great majority of Earth's inhabitants, starvation is the greatest hazard to be avoided. Cooperation between men and nations is given lip service; institutions for its achievement are established, and then studiously disregarded.

"Although these c r e a t u r e s pride themselves on what they call science, they have not yet attained the faintest glimmer of understanding of the universe. They have succeeded in prolonging the lives of many, only to feed those saved into the maws of war, thereby

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destroying the distinction between fortunate and unfortunate.

"Of self-knowledge and truth they have none. They lie habitually, being unable to admit truth even to themselves, and they know not why.

"With an intuitive realization of their inevitable doom, many render their lot bearable by the consumption of drugs which produce insensibility. In passing, it may be remarked that it is often impossible to distinguish the latter from many of their fellows who do not resort to such drugs.

"The radioactivity which brought the planet to our attention was caused by a series of atomic explosions, produced by the victors in a war just ended. Not content with this horror, these creatures plan fresh wars in which more destructive weapons will be utilized. A further extension of bestiality will be the use made in the next conflict of intentionally spread diseases.

"In closing, and fearful lest this report seem exaggerated, the commander of this expedition reports that millions of these Earthlings find recreation in the witnessing of exhibitions in which men batter each other mercilessly."

KRESAN'S voice stopped, and for a moment there was silence. The grin had faded from Entar's face. He looked grim. Fenir and Blatt were aghast.

"Good grief," Fenir said at last. "Can such things be?"

"I saw it with my own eyes," Kresan assured him.

"Well?" Entar asked Blatt. Entar's grin had returned, a bit malicious now. "What do you think? Are these creatures civilized? Or sentient beings? Those were your expressions, I believe."

"Incredible," Blatt said. "Not even the blue men of Krinza sank so low."

"That's all I wanted to hear," Entar said. "I'll order the ray-blasting to begin at once. Or do you have more misguided sympathy? Or more philosophy for us?"

A slow flush mounted to Blatt's cheeks.

"Since you bring it up, yes."

"Come now," Fenir snorted. "You're just being difficult."

"Let him rave," Entar said. He was laughing. "This gets funnier right along."

"Perhaps," Blatt said. "But the point I wish to make is a fine one, and therefore one which you especially, Entar, should appreciate."

Blatt's compliment was acknowledged with a mock bow and he went on.

"It is true that we have never before encountered such bestiality and malignance. Nothing even approaching it, in fact. Yet it is in that very circumstance that I find hope!

"The excesses of other worlds have been limited in c o m p a r i s o n with Earth's. But limited by what? By a lack of intelligence. After all, it does take some intelligence to conceive such horrors as disease warfare. And where there is a ray of intelligence there is hope."

"You're impossible, Blatt!" Fenir said. "There's a good chance they'll blow their solar system apart with their atomic toys."

"They probably will," Blatt admitted. "It is almost a certainty they will. But as long as some intelligence exists, they have a chance to save thmselves."

"I deny such intelligence exists on the planet Earth," Entar said. "And if they want to save themselves they'd better do it soon. My fleet is in readiness to leave right now."

"To kill a child is as much murder as to kill a man," Blatt warned. "By the same token, if you destroy the germ of sentience it is as though you had de-

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stroyed it full grown."

"I found no such germ in Kresan's report. Did you, Fenir?"

"Not I."

"Then it's two against one," Entar said. "Order the fleet to leave, Kresan."

"One moment, please," Blatt begged. He turned to Kresan.

"Perhaps there was something you did not report, something which may have seemed unimportant."

"There was one interesting thing," Kresan admitted. "They play a game which is much like kven. But with their usual belligerence. Their finest players often seek unfair advantage, and many of them cultivate unpleasant mannerisms designed to upset their opponents."

"Aha!" Blatt shouted. "I thought there would be something. And you, of all people, Entar, must admit that kven is a game requiring intelligence."

"It's probably not at all like kven," Entar said angrily.

"They are played much the same," Kresan informed him. "I have with me the score of a game played between two experts."

HE BROUGHT out a sheet of paper and laid it on the table. The three Gardooks gathered about it while Kresan explained.

"What we call a Gardook is there called a King. A Gardoona is a Queen, a Teva a Knight, a Blen a Bishop, and a Marba a Pawn. The game is called Chess."

"Well?" It was Blatt's turn to crow.

"It means nothing," Entar retorted. "Look at this score. Experts, mind you! Any child of Demos could defeat them in ten moves."

The Gardook of Demos knew the weakness of his argument. He was more than a little angry. Blatt had put him to a great deal of expense already. And there was a good chance the planet might not repay him.

"In five moves," Blatt was saying. "But this may not represent the best play of Earth."

Entar's eyes narrowed. He was quick to note that Blatt had slipped up by venturing into conjecture. Perhaps, the Gardook of Demos thought, he might take advantage of the slip and come out with a profit. It would be a good joke.

"So now they are masters of kven," Entar snorted. "Next thing you'll be saying one of these Earthlings might beat me!"

"Anything is possible," Blatt said.

"Care to bet on that?"

"You know I don't bet."

"In other words, you're not prepared to back up your beliefs. Kresan, you may as well get started."

"Hold on," Blatt said. "This is all fun to you. But it's serious business with me. So serious that I'm willing to break my vow."

Entar was instantly contrite. Basically he was a good hearted man.

"No," he said. "I wouldn't want you to do that. But since you are my friend, and this means so much to you, I am going to make you a proposition."

"What is it?"

"I am going to Earth with my fleet. And when I get there I am going to search out the greatest player on the planet and have a game with him. If I beat him we ray-blast the planet. If he beats me I turn around and come home and forget we ever discovered the place."

"That's not an even gamble," Blatt protested.

"Best I can do. But I'll be kind. When we blast them we'll do it from all sides at once. They'll never know what hit them."

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WARM weather was hard on Binky. His breathing, beneath the thin sheet which covered him, was shallow and labored. Yet his eyes remained bright as ever.

"This is it, Harkness," he said softly.

"This is it," Dave agreed. "Too bad it has to be Resnevsky I play for the championship."

His last word produced a change in Binky. Eyelids puffy and dark from lack of sleep came down over the dark eyes. Binky's breathing seemed to stop; and for a moment Dave thought he was dead. Then the eyes opened.

"The *championship,*" Binky whispered dreamily. "And against Resnevsky! I'm *glad* it's Resnevsky. To win from anyone but the best would be a hollow victory."

"I think I understand," Dave said.

"Yes, I think you do. You've worked hard for this, harder than you would ever work for yourself."

"After all . . ."

"No. I know what you were about to say. But your attitude isn't that of a man unwillingly paying a debt. You've put your whole heart in this, just to give me what I want. How easy it would have been for you to make just one slip! And there would have been an end to your drudgery, your slavery. No more games to memorize, no more to play.

"But you're not that kind, Harkness. You wouldn't even think of cheating. You're a fine man, a *good* man."

The effort of speaking had tired Binky. For a moment he was silent. Then he smiled wanly.

"Too good a man to hate, Harkness. I stopped hating you a long time ago. I want you to know that, before you leave tonight." He stirred slightly. "Well, this is the last. After tonight you'll be your own man again."

"What if I lose?"

Binky smiled at that. His eyes lifted to the clock Dave had put on the wall beyond the foot of Binky's bed.

"You won't lose. When that clock strikes midnight you will have made your thirtieth move. The game will be over; your debt to me will be paid in full."

It turned out that Dave's wife had been thinking the same thing. When he came downstairs she was waiting for him. Dave saw that she had been drinking. She often did that now.

"Binky's Little Robot!" Ellen laughed. Lately she had taken to calling Dave that. "If it isn't the Zombie of Chess, all set to go out and win the championship!"

Then she was suddenly serious and her hand was on Dave's sleeve.

"You've *got* to win, Dave. It means our freedom."

Very gently he removed her hand.

"Not for me, Ellen. Maybe for you it's right to feel that way. But not for me. As long as Binky lives I'm going to take care of him."

TONIGHT Dave Harkness was news. There were reporters and photographers, and flashlights kept going off in his face. By his nerveless, logical play he had become classified as a cold fish, a perfect foil for Resnevsky's brilliance.

Dave wondered what they would say if he told them why he could play so swiftly, so emotionlessly, without apparent thought.

Resnevsky was already on the dais, beneath the electric board which would flash every move they made to the audience. He was chewing on the stub of a cigar, rocking back and forth on his heels. Championship play was no novelty for him. He saw Dave coming and smiled and put out his hand.

"Quite a crowd," Resnevsky said

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pleasantly. "Let's give them a good show."

Then they were sitting down and Resnevsky's face was tight and composed, the cigar jutting out of the corner of his mouth. His eyes were narrowed to slits.

Dave drew White and the match was on.

As Binky had predicted it was Queen's Gambit, declined, precisely the game which Resnevsky preferred. Dave's opening was intentionally aggressive, leaving Resnevsky an apparent play for the isolation of Dave's Queen's pawn.

But Resnevsky was no man to underrate an opponent. He choose to ignore the opening in favor of a development of his middle. When his attack came the way had been carefully prepared. His caution was suddenly gone.

Queen to Bishop five, the electric board flashed.

There was a gasp from the audience. The move had come out of a clear sky. They waited tensely, expecting to see Dave show signs of panic.

They were disappointed. His counter move was made swiftly, without hesitation. Binky had expected Resnevsky to bring his Queen down and had made provisions for it.

Within two moves Resnevsky had withdrawn his Queen. What had seemed an impregnable position was being assailed from all sides. Resnevsky slowed down, as Binky had said he would.

Dave had time now to look over the audience. From this point on the game would proceed according to blueprint. Resnevsky would find what looked like a certain winning combination. By the time he discovered his mistake it would be too late.

But the audience couldn't know that. They were all sitting erect, their attention fixed on Resnevsky and the board. They were all waiting eagerly for one of his famous flashes of brilliance.

Not quite all of them, Dave saw. His eyes were drawn to a man he had seen the night before. It would have been difficult to avoid noticing this spectator. Despite the warmth of the evening he wore an overcoat buttoned up.

Probably a chess fanatic who had pawned his only suit so that he could buy a ticket to the championship match. There were plenty like that. Yet this spectator was too relaxed to be one of them. He seemed not to care whether it was Dave or Resnevsky who won.

Resnevsky had found his combination by now and Dave had to turn back to the board. Looking at it, he almost doubted Binky for a moment. Resnevsky's black pieces were solid, his own white ones spread widely.

It was almost impossible to believe that in another ten moves the game would be over. Resnevsky certainly did not believe that. He was smiling.

Then Dave's Knight began its relentless advance across the board and Resnevsky lost his smile. Step by step he was driven back. It was too late for brillance now. Every move he made was putting him deeper into the hole.

He was so completely bewildered that Dave felt sorry for him. Resnevsky was actually talking to himself!

"How did this happen to me?" Dave heard him mutter.

The cigar was tilted downward as Resnevsky studied the board. So far the audience did not realize that the match was over. But Resnevsky realized it, even before Binky had said he would. Dave looked at his watch: eleven-thirty, the twenty-ninth move. Then Resnevsky was smiling up at Dave, a trifle sadly, a little bitterly.

"My congratulations, Mr. Harkness. Some time you must tell me how you did it."

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SOME time, Dave thought, he would tell them all. Some time the name of Dave Harkness would be erased from the record books, and Binky would have what was rightfully his. Binky didn't want it that way; not yet, he had said.

There were more pictures and a good deal of polite cheering, and then a good deal of handshaking. And then the hall began to clear and the lights were dimmed and Dave was free to go.

It was just outside the door that he found himself next to the man in the overcoat.

"He could have beaten you, you know," the man in the overcoat said.

His voice was strangely metallic, and a little hollow, like a phonograph record. Dave stared at him blankly and paused, and in that interval they fell behind the last remnants of the crowd.

"But of course," the strange man continued. "Even after the twenty-sixth move; in any one of twelve different ways."

His first guess had been right, Dave thought. The man was a chess fanatic, the kind who could figure out any problem—after the game was over.

"You're probably right," was what Dave said. "I wish I had the time to discuss it with you. But I haven't."

He tried to move ahead and the other stepped directly in front of him. For an instant Dave was angry, and he had an impulse to shove the fellow aside.

Instead, he said, "Look, now, why don't you move along?"

And suddenly they were not alone. There were now six or seven men who had seemingly materialized out of thin air, all of them ridiculously buttoned up in heavy coats. There was also a limousine drawn up at the curb, with another coated figure at the wheel.

"What kind of crazy joke is this?" Dave demanded. Inside, he was a little frightened. None of these men were smiling.

"There is nothing to be afraid of," the first one said. "I merely wish to play a game of chess with you."

The door of the limousine was open now and they were moving toward it. Dave looked around wildly for a policeman.

"Hey," he said, "you can't get away with . . ."

But they *were* getting away with it. He was inside the big car and they were all around him and the car was moving smoothly off. And as they turned the corner there was a policeman. When he saw the size of the car the policeman tipped his hat.

Then they were off the narrow streets and onto a main artery and rushing toward the edge of the city. Dave made one desperate lunge for the door and was caught short. Gently but firmly he was pushed back into the seat.

"That was foolish," said the leader of the group. "You might have injured yourself. And really, I just want to play a single game with you."

Suddenly Dave had it. This fellow was a fanatic, all right. But a rich one; rich enough to arrange a kidnaping merely for the pleasure of playing a game with the champion. But why the overcoats?

He found he had spoken the question aloud.

"It is uncomfortable," the leader admitted. "And I felt frightfully conspicuous. But I suppose I should have been even more conspicuous without it."

He was unbuttoning the heavy coat and shrugging out of it. And then Dave saw that he had four arms.

JUST how big the thing was, Dave could not tell. It seemed to be round and as tall as a three story build-

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ing and it filled all of the great clearing in the woods near the city. And yet, strangely enough, he could not see it.

What he really saw, Dave realized, was a sort of black hole in the bright moonlight which illuminated everything else in the countryside. Whatever this thing was, it had the quality of absorbing light.

For a while the car had coasted along without lights, and with nobody speaking. Now they had stopped before this thing and everyone was getting out. Dave found he was in the center of the group. They stepped into the blackness and through what must have been a door, because suddenly the blackness was gone.

Light came from nowhere, yet was everywhere, illuminating immense curving walls of some strange metal. Yet this space they were in constituted only a part of the whole, for there were doors leading to other parts of the place.

There was an instrument panel on one wall. There was also a goodly amount of furniture, but of gigantic proportions.

"Look here—" Dave began. His captor cut him short.

"Just one moment, Mr. Harkness, if you will. Kresan and his men don't seem to mind, but I find my present scale confining."

He and the rest went out through a door, leaving Dave alone. After a few minutes there was a high pitched humming that faded quickly.

The thought of escape entered Dave's mind, but before he could get fairly started he heard them coming back and returned to the position where they had left him. Then the door was opening and they were back in the room. Dave's eye popped; he was thankful he had not run.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you," the leader said. "I hope our present size doesn't frighten you."

It was hard to believe. But there could be no doubt about it. That face, now grown so enormous, was the same one which had confronted Dave outside the tourney hall. The gigantic furniture in this room made sense now.

"Allow me to introduce myself," the leader was saying. "I am Entar, Gardook of Demos." He gestured vaguely. "A Gardook is somewhat like a king, or a president. Demos, of course, is another planet, rather distant from Earth."

He turned to one of his companions, his equal in height.

"Better scale down a chair and table and kven board so that our guest may play in comfort, Kresan."

Then Entar turned back to Dave.

"Before we go any further I should like to make certain everything is clear. Please correct me if I am mistaken. This year there is no international chess tournament. But two of the contestants in this national tournament which you won were former world champions. Resnevsky, whom you defeated this evening, has defeated the European titleholder. Therefore you may be considered not only national, but world champion. Is that correct?"

"I . . . I suppose so," Dave said.

"Good. Now we had better begin. You may have first move."

But as they were seated, Entar towering above Dave, the Gardook hesitated.

"I suppose I had better warn you," he said. "It wouldn't be fair otherwise."

"Warn me about what?" Dave asked. He was completely bewildered.

"That you had better not lose. The stakes in this game are high."

"Stakes? I don't understand."

Entar seemed nettled by the delay. Then he muttered, "I suppose not," and turned to Kresan. "Contact the fleet."

A part of the instrument panel on the

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wall slid away and its place was taken by a great screen. While Dave watched, the screen glowed, darkened, and was suddenly filled in with a background of stars. Against this background were ranged a full dozen circular ships, like the one in which Dave sat.

"Those ships are twenty thousand miles out in space," Entar said. "If you should win this game they will never come any closer."

"And if I lose?" Dave asked.

"Within five minutes after you lose they will have circled this diminutive planet and blasted it with rays which will kill every living thing on it."

DAVE'S mind whirled. He would have liked to think this was all a dream. But it wasn't. This gigantic, four-armed creature was as real as he was. Those space ships were real. And Entar meant what he said.

"Wait," Dave blurted. "You don't understand. I didn't really win that game tonight. It wasn't I . . ."

"That's ignoble," Entar said. "Trying to crawl out of it. You'd better begin playing before I change my mind about giving you a chance to save your planet."

Dave had no choice. In a daze, he moved a pawn forward in a routine opening. Entar shifted one of his pieces. Dave fought grimly to regain his composure. If he had to go through with this he might as well do his best.

He dawdled over his next move for long minutes, finally pushed up a Knight. Entar's move followed immediately, and he was smiling. Another two moves and the Gardook of Demos was chuckling.

Dave stared at the board helplessly. His own feeble skill would never win this game. Desperately he wracked his brain for some plan. In a few moves Entar had established the fact that he was an unbelievably expert player.

Now Dave knew how Resnevsky must have felt. Now Dave wished with all his heart that Resnevsky had won. Resnevsky might have had a chance.

And yet Dave knew that was not true. With Earth at stake, there was only one person who might be good enough to beat Entar. Only Binky would have had a ghost of a chance.

"This is ridiculous," Entar was saying. "Kresan, order the fleet to prepare to blast."

"Wait," Dave begged. He had to think of something. If he could only talk to Binky!

"Wait," he said again, "you're taking an unfair advantage of me."

Entar's eyes narrowed to slits. "How do you mean that?"

"It's my wife," Dave said. "She's not well."

"What has that to do with it? Besides, she won't suffer long."

"But I can't keep my mind on the game. If I could only talk to her."

Entar made a gesture of disgust. "Kresan," he said. "can you arrange for Mr. Harkness to speak to his wife?"

"Yes. We can cut into the telephone circuit. It will take only a few minutes. What is your number, Mr. Harkness?"

Dave told him the number in a dull voice. His ruse had failed. But perhaps not completely. If he could speak to Binky for just a minute there might be something Binky could think of.

Kresan was turning some dials and there was the sound of a telephone ringing. The room was filled with it. Then Ellen's voice came in, loud but strangely unclear.

"Who is it?"

Kresan said, "Just speak naturally. She will hear you."

"It's I, Ellen," Dave said. She be-

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gan to laugh crazily and he had to shout above her laughter. "Plug in the extension in Binky's room. I must speak to Binky."

But Ellen kept laughing. Suddenly Dave realized his wife was drunk; drunk and almost hysterical.

"I've got to talk to Binky!" Dave shouted desperately.

"That's funny" Ellen laughed. "Very funny."

Ellen hadn't laughed like that in years. It wasn't only liquor that was making her laugh now. Suddenly, just before she spoke, Dave knew why she was so happy.

"You can't talk to Binky. And he can't talk to you. It's very funny, Dave, but Binky wasn't lying about his heart. He died a half hour ago!"

ELLEN'S voice kept hammering inside Dave's head. He could still hear her. Binky was dead! The only one who might have saved the Earth. And he was dead!

"I think we have wasted enough time with these tricks," Entar was saying.

Dave nodded. No use in delaying further. What difference would another hour make. Might as well play and get it over with.

He made an attempt to think out a line of play. But that was useless. Entar blocked him before he had made two moves. It was no use. No matter what he played, Entar would win in another few moves. Dave reached for a piece, not caring which one his hand would touch first. Why prolong the agony?

"Hold it!"

Dave's hand stopped in mid-air. His jaw dropped. He must be going mad! That was Binky's voice he'd heard!

He looked around wildly. He *was* going mad. Binky was dead and he was only hearing an imaginary voice. His hand came down on a Bishop. And the voice spoke again:

"Take it easy, Dave."

"But how. . . ?"

"I don't know. Dave. Somehow I knew you'd won tonight. I knew I was dying. But I suddenly knew I had to play one more game. I willed myself not to die, and part of me lived. I don't know how or why. But it did.

"Don't make me talk more than I must. It's taking all my will power to hold myself here and concentrate on this game. Just do as I say."

"All right," Dave whispered.

"We'll play him safe until I get a line on his game. Pawn to Queen five."

Dave moved the piece obediently and Entar shifted his Knight to Bishop four.

"Knight to Bishop five."

Entar suddenly looked up at Dave and then moved his own Knight over.

"Queen to King three."

"What?" Dave asked. He hadn't heard Binky's whisper. Binky repeated what he had said.

"What are you muttering about?" Entar grumbled.

He seemed perplexed now and took his time about shifting his own Pawn. When he looked at Dave again his eyes were thoughtful.

Every move now was debated, the result of long and careful deliberation. Binky's voice was less urgent.

"You're getting him now!" Dave whispered.

"Yes. He's never seen this one. The game Colle and Gruenfield played in Berlin in '26. Queen takes Pawn . . . Check!"

But Entar had lost his troubled look, and now when he moved his King out of check he was smiling. Binky's voice was suddenly frightened.

"No! I didn't think of that!"

"What's the matter?" Dave said.

"Are you trying to take my mind off

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the game?" Entar demanded. Dave shook his head. He'd better watch himself.

"He outsmarted me," Binky whispered. *"If I follow up with Pawn to Queen five he'll crack down with his Bishop. He's good, Dave. Maybe too good."*

There was a sinking feeling in the pit of Dave's stomach. But Binky had not given up. He called off moves and Dave played them.

Twice it seemed that Entar was stopped cold and in trouble. Each time he extricated himself neatly and was in stronger position than before.

With superlative play Binky held the middle. His voice showed the strain he was under as Entar shifted to a fresh attack. It seemed that nothing, not even Binky, could stop the Gardook of Demos.

Then the worst happened. Binky's voice was growing faint.

"Dave! I can't hold myself here! Too much strain. I can't see the board any . . ."

"Binky!" Dave cried. "Binky!"

But there was no answer. Binky was gone. They had lost.

ENTAR leaned back and looked at the board. Dave's outburst had upset him momentarily, and then his next three moves had finished the game. The Gardook toyed with Dave's king, which he had just taken.

"Too bad," he began. "Of course, you play very erratically. Under other circumstances I should say, better luck next time. But there won't be a next time."

Dave didn't bother to answer. His head was sunk on his chest.

"Still, you did as well as could be expected," Entar said.

"As well!" Dave was bitter. "If Binky could have held on we might have beaten you!"

"Binky? We? What are you talking about?"

"You asked me if I was trying to upset you," Dave said. "I wasn't. I was talking to someone you couldn't see. Someone who died over an hour ago. You couldn't hear him, but you could hear me."

"This fellow is a worse loser than Fenir," Entar said. He turned to Kresan. "I'm afraid losing has unsettled his mind. Better give the order to the fleet."

A flush crept up into Dave's cheeks. He was angry.

"I may not know how to play chess, but I'm not crazy!"

"Don't take it so hard," Entar told him. "I didn't say you can't play chess at all."

"The fleet is ready," Kresan interrupted. "As soon as Harkness has left the ship they will start the ray-blasts."

"Whether you said it or not, I really can't play," Dave said, ignoring Kresan's interruption. "Without Binky to plan my games I couldn't have beaten most average players."

Kresan was moving toward him but Entar waved the fleet commander back.

"Wait. This sounds interesting. Almost plausible, in fact. I noticed his play in the tournament. Like an automaton. And just now; he started badly, became suddenly strong, and then finished as though he didn't know what he was doing."

"That was when Binky faded out," Dave said.

"And just who is Binky?" Entar asked.

There didn't seem much point in it, but Dave told him. Something about Entar inspired confidence. Dave started at the beginning and told the whole story, even the things he had never told Ellen for fear she would not have

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let him keep Binky at home.

"It was partly his fault," Dave said. "But after all, he was the one who lost most. I tried to make it up to him."

"Even though you were not legally responsible?"

"It wasn't a question of legality. I couldn't have lived with myself if I hadn't taken him into my home. And then, when he told me of his ambition, I simply had to do everything in my power to help him attain it. He was entitled to whatever happiness I could give him."

Dave found that Entar was looking at him very strangely. He laughed shortly.

"I suppose it's hard to believe my story," he said.

"Not so difficult. The more we know, the less skeptical we are likely to be."

"Well," Dave shrugged, "it doesn't matter now. Binky is gone and it's all over. He's the only one who could have beat you."

"Not even your Binky could have beat me," Entar assured him.

"We'll never know. Now, if you'll show me how to get out I'll be going. And you can carry out your threat."

"I don't think so," Entar said. "No, I don't think so."

"But I lost," Dave said in astonishment. "Even with Binky's help I lost."

"Binky lost. But you didn't lose. There isn't enough intelligence on this planet of yours to have saved it. But there is something else that's more important than intelligence. You have that something else."

"I don't understand," Dave said.

"Naturally. Well, in a little while we shall be on our way back to Demos. Before Kresan takes you out to the automobile I would like to shake your hand. Goodbye, Mr. Harkness."

ALL the lights in the house were on when Dave stopped the car before it. He came up the walk slowly, shaking his head like a man pulling himself out of a dream.

Ellen was waiting for him inside; and now she did not seem drunk at all. Her arms went around Dave. For the first time in many months her cheek was pressed against his in affection.

"I'm sorry, dear," Ellen said. "I must have upset you terribly. But it seemed as though suddenly a tremendous load was off my shoulders. I just went crazy, I guess."

"It's all right. I realize what you've been through since Binky came. He's really dead, isn't he?"

"Yes. It happened about midnight, I think. He looked quite peaceful, as though he knew you'd won."

"Poor fellow. He was a great man, Ellen."

"Perhaps. And so are you, Dave, in a different way."

"I don't understand," Dave said for the second time that night.

He thought that perhaps it was because he was very tired that he could not see what Ellen and Entar meant. He had only done what was right. He was sure that anyone with a good heart would have done the same.

COMING NEXT MONTH:—

WAR OF THE GIANT APES

By ALEXANDER BLADE

A thrilling tale of super science. What were these strange giant creatures of Mars? Had man finally discovered a race of beings superior to him? And was it a mistake to bring one of them to Earth? Read this tale of dramatic action in the big April issue.

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Queen of The Gods

By Frances Yerxa

THE major wife of Zeus and the undisputed power among the Olympian gods, was Hera. Her principle virtues were those of marital accord and felicity and she is regarded as the patron of married couples. She hated, above all, any example of immorality, both among humans and among the gods, and one of her major activities was the punishing of violators of her precepts. With this sense of justice, she became harsh and vindictive and often shrewish. Furthermore she was extremely vain and proud of her appearance.

A very lovely story is told which reflects upon her vanity. It seems that the sea-nymph Theits was marrying a mortal named Peleus. All of the gods and goddesses were invited except Eris who was the goddess of discord. Of course, angry at not being invited, she decided to throw a monkey wrench in the works. Actually she hurled down a golden apple on which was inscribed the phrase, "For the Fairest." Of course all of the goddesses immediately claimed it, but after a short while the argument reduced itself to deciding between Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite. Hermes decided that a young shepherd named Paris should choose among the three.

Paris was put on the spot. Each goddess tried to bribe him. Hera offered him an extensive rule and great power. Athene promised him military power and glory and Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world. Paris chose Aphrodite.

Thereafter Aphrodite became known as the Goddess of Beauty. Eris had her little revenge. And Hera of course blew her top. She completely expected that Paris would have chosen her. When he didn't she resolved to have her revenge on him. She is said to have caused the Trojan war. Zeus favored Troy, and Hera and he often quarreled.

Hera is almost always represented as seated on a throne, a very dignified, and beautiful, but matronly type. She carries a scepter and on her head is a crown. By her side is a peacock, indicating her vanity.

The Romans of course had their equivalent of Hera but they called her Juno, the wife of Jupiter. Juno more typified the matronly type than Hera and she appears more human and lovable. Juno watched over and guarded the life of every married woman, from the time she was born to the time of her death.

Hydraulic Helper

By Marvin Kentley

INDUSTRY has stepped in with another gadget that will help to simplify the world's work. Like so many of the inventions that strongly influence the design of material things, this new device is simple—extremely so.

Imagine that you were confronted with a problem—let's say, for the sake of discussion that you encountered the problem that troubles ship-owners. The hatches through which a freighter is loaded are large and massive and difficult to open. Yet they must be opened and closed frequently. To do this by hand, as it so often has been done, is a hard job. To do it with an electric motor would make it a simple job, the only trouble being that a very large electric motor of some hundred or so horsepower being required. Obviously an electric motor will not do. What would be nice would be some sort of a gadget that could store up several hundred horsepower and release it for the brief time necessary to operate the hatch door.

There are a lot of ways of storing power, but one of the simplest is in the form of a compressed gas, a gas conveniently squeezed by hydraulic power.

The hydraulic accumulator as it is known is nothing more than a pressed steel cylinder of very small size, ranging from a few inches in diameter to a few feet. Inside the cylinder is a rubber bag containing air and when unstressed the capacity of the bag occupies about two-thirds of the space of the cylinder. Leading into the cylinder is a tube carrying oil and connected to a pump driven by a small electric motor geared down so that it can create a strong pressure.

It is a well-known fact that when a gas is compressed, energy is stored in it. Now the little electric motor forces the hydraulic fluid into the cylinder. This compresses the bag containing the gas thus storing energy in it, energy which may be released at a great rate.

This gadget has been applied to the problem mentioned above. It has saved as much as a thousand dollars per day. But its use is almost incalculable. Bomb-bay doors, doors of any kind, machine tools, almost anything that requires a strong impulse for a short time can make excellent use of this apparatus. Very likely you will see it in lavish use on familiar things like automobiles, where it can be applied to opening trunks and hoods, convertible tops and doors.

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SCIENTIFIC ODDITIES

By LYNN STANDISH

GAS ATTACK

THE newspapers recently have been full of the strange attack that assailed a small town in which industrial operations were being conducted. In an extremely humid air, large quantities of industrial gases managed to escape. There was a particularly strong amount of sulfur dioxide, the same gas that has been used in refrigerating mechanisms and which has caused some asphyxiation gases, and this gas escaped to mingle with the moist air.

As so often happens, the sulfur dioxide dissolved in the moist air or was taken into solution where it further oxidized to form sulfuric acid.

The results were ghastly. Almost twenty elderly people died from breathing this lethal atmosphere and a good portion of the town was evacuated. Apparently it affected the old people so strongly because they are usually more susceptible to lung ailments and respiratory diseases.

In any event the rest of the town, the majority of the townspeople came down with sickness. This danger of pollution so common these days usually doesn't affect the atmosphere as it did in this case. More often than not it is a matter of water pollution—a problem that is continually being combatted by various agencies.

* * *

SUPER SIRENS

BY USING special devices, scientists can create sounds that vibrate millions of times a second. These sounds are called ultra sonic because they vibrate above the top level of 16,000 times per second heard by the human ear. Ultrasonics can kill bacteria in milk in one-half second, can knock birds out of the air, and can dispel fog, smoke and soot from the air. Although these sounds are far above our range of hearing, we can feel their effects. If you would stand in the path of ultrasonic sound waves, you would be overcome by a feeling of doom. Your muscles would twitch and your eyes would not function together. As a medical experiment, ultrasonic waves have been sent through a dog's skull to its brain and performed knifeless surgery. A very practical British scientist announced that ultrasonic sound waves shook the dirt from his clothes without scrubbing.

* * *

SPONGE BIRTH

ONE of the biggest problems of biologists is to figure out how the large and more advanced forms of life developed from the simpler types. There is one theory that many-celled animals such as the sponges, arose from colonies of single-celled creatures that had grouped together for protection. There is an odd, slimy mold called Dyctyostelium by science, which sometimes forms over water. The cells of this mold may live as separate individuals like the amoeba, but sometimes they will clump together and then many others—as many as tens of thousands—will float over and add themselves to the group. They do not form just a shapeless mass but arrange themselves into a sausage-like creature that crawls about and reacts to light. A new type of organism emerges. There are no longer individual cells that function independently, but each becomes a part of a whole cell community. We can only guess as to why this effort to co-operation is made. It may be that joining together helps them to avoid harmful substances that are in the water, or it may be an efficient method of getting around to a better food supply.

The signal that brings the cells together has recently been discovered. It is a chemical substance that they give forth which spreads out into the surrounding waters around a group of colonizing cells attracting cells which lie at a distance.

* * *

HOMING PIGEONS

HOW a pigeon can find its way home even over strange territory has presented quite a problem. Someone theorized that some part of the pigeon's nervous system is sensitive to the magnetic pull of the earth. If that were the case, then a tiny magnet attached to the bird would upset his sense of direction. So a pair of small iron magnets were attached to each wing of some homing pigeons, and sure enough, the magnets set up currents that completely confused the birds. Most all of them lost their way home. Pieces of metal of equal weight were added to the wings of other homing pigeons and they had no trouble at all.

There are many points on the face of the earth that have the same magnetic pull, and pigeons must have a way of telling one from another.

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Pigeons also can tell the speed of the earth revolving below them.

Because of the variation in the earth's speed from north to south, sensitivity to speed gives the pigeons their latitude, telling them how far they are from the poles.

Because of the pigeon's two unusual sensitivities, to the earth's magnetism and to its revolving speed, they hold the most wonderful and delicate navigation tools.

* * *

MAGIC WORLD

PEOPLE are willing to go pretty far to see something unusual. Often they will travel to the most outlandish places to see the strange. How few realize that very often the oddest things are right in their midst.

A discerning mind is easily able to recognize some peculiar phenomena when wandering through a gallery or a museum devoted to modern art. Naturally the conventional painters do not come in for consideration here. But consider some of the futuristic painters. Many have made efforts to bring out what is in the subconscious mind—and they've succeeded admirably. A mottled and daubed bit of canvas containing no recognizable elements will be labeled, "Young Lady in a Bath." We may examine the painting for hours, failing to see either the young lady or the bath, yet the artist will assure us that we are seeing both but that we have a mental block that prevents us from recognizing either.

And serious scientists have pointed out that the artists have a perfect right to what they say. Often they will show us the occupational therapy found in mental institutions. Here we see art work suspiciously like that of the moderns—yet we cannot laugh for the very things have come from the tortured and agonized subconscious natures of the ill.

* * *

HEAT REMOVER—PLUS!

EVERYONE is conscious of the new development in the steel industry, the continuous casting of steel. We have already considered the general process, but now information has been released on exactly how the steel is cast.

Any process that is continuous is an excellent measure of the ability of a shop to produce at a high rate. Continuous pouring of metal has always been a bottle-neck. To eliminate this intermittent casting of billets to feed to the rolling mills has taken a lot of work, but at last results have been produced. The secret of continuous pouring of steel lies in the creation of a mold capable of removing the vast amount of heat given off by molten steel. In ordinary casting it is simply a matter of storing the metal in a mold and letting it cool off gradually by radiation and conduction, a matter of days.

But for continuous work, heat must be removed at a high rate even while the metal is flowing down the vertical mold. The solution is surprisingly simple. The mold is of thin-walled brass. Naturally molten steel against this metal would melt it instantly—except for one thing. The brass mold is water-cooled! Something like five or six hundred gallons of water per minute play against the mold and remove the heat as fast as it is given up to the mold. The net result is that the steel is cooled to a semi-solid in no time at all. And of course in the next few minutes, this metal hardens completely on the outside, so that it can be cut up into beams suitable for the rolling mills. This means that decentralization of the industry is much nearer.

* * *

GOLD POISONING

CHEMISTS are continually exploring the use of chemical compounds to combat disease. Each year, several new materials are found that spell death to bacteria. Last year we learned about the substance called BAL (British anti-lewisite). BAL was developed to combat effects of arsenic poisoning, but recently it was learned that this substance can protect a person from gold poisoning. Doctors give arthritic patients injections of gold compounds to relieve their condition, and if too much gold is used gold poisoning is the result. Now with the discovery of BAL which can quickly cure any gold poisoning, more gold can be administered to the suffering arthritic patients.

* * *

BUDDHA ROBBERY

ONE OF the great wonders of Bangkok, fabulous capitol of Siam, was mysteriously robbed a short time ago. It caused a great commotion among the city's populace, for the item taken was the beautiful diamond in the forehead of Siam's sacred Emerald Buddha. Discovery of the theft was made by a yellow robed priest who entered to pray. As he raised his eyes, he was horrified to see a blank space in the benignant brow where for generations the huge diamond had glittered like a star. Investigators discovered a false stone lying at the Buddha's feet. Apparently the thieves had intended to substitute a stone to conceal their crime, but in their haste had failed to cement it in properly.

The superstitious Siamese feel that such a crime is the work of the devils, since mere men would never dare to rob a god. Cynical police and detectives are on the job trying to clear up the crime, but the Siamese are assured that no matter how the law makes out, Buddha's own justice can not fail to bring a harsh judgment upon the violators of the age-old temple laws.

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fantastic Facts

By LEE OWENS

EOS, THE COMEDIENNE

THE sister of the Grecian god of the Sun, Helios, was named Eos (Aurora) the Dawn. The Greeks attributed dawn to Eos driving her chariot before the sun pointing the way so to speak for the more intense light of day. Eos was also the goddess of twilight and her magnificent castle was reputed to be in the west.

A very clever story is told about Eos. It seemed that she fell violently in love with an ordinary mortal of exceeding beauty. She married Tithonus, son of the King of Troy and procured for him the gift of immortality. For a while all went well, until finally she realized that she had made a mistake. She had failed to obtain, along with immortality, eternal youth, so that Tithonus soon became an old man. Soon he was little more than a senile old man full of age's infirmities. Eos confined him to a small room where he did nothing but babble ceaselessly of his troubles and tribulations. Eventually he begged Eos for the gift of death, but once given, immortality cannot be retracted and so perforce, Tithonus was compelled to stay alive.

After some time, Eos reached the limit. She could no longer stand the crying and moaning of Tithonus. Since he did nothing but wail, she transformed him, through her magic powers into a grasshopper! And the ceaseless chirping of that creature strongly resembles and simulates the ceaseless babbling of old age.

* * *

ROMAN DEITY

THE Romans had the common habit of appropriating and compounding within their own religious scheme, any gods they fancied. Thus the ancient Greek god, Cronus, the god of Time, was assumed by the Romans to be their old god of agriculture, Saturn. His attributes were supposed to be the same as those of Cronus.

When Saturn was exiled from the heavens by Zeus for his part in a heavenly revolt, he was sheltered by Janus, a king of Italy and a mortal. Presumably their reign together was peaceful for the age was known as "The Golden Age."

The Romans represented Saturn as bearing a sickle in one hand and a sheaf of wheat in the other, thus blending his properties of managing agricultural pursuits and controlling time. In Rome itself, a huge temple was erected to him wherein were stored the public treasury and the laws of the realm.

Sacrifices were offered to Saturn to encourage him to guard these repositories, with his heart and soul and to develop them. Saturn was linked also to a series of agricultural orgies from which our description of an orgiastic affair stems. The word is "saturnalia."

* * *

RHEA—MOTHER EARTH

IT WAS only logical that the ancient Greeks should immortalize the Earth itself with worship and with a godly title. Rhea was the Great Mother, the earth fruitful from which all life stemmed. Above all she was supposed to have produced all the Olympian gods. Rhea is always depicted in mythology as a matronly figure wearing a crown of towers, sitting on a throne and surrounded by her favorite beast, lions. She also rides in a chariot drawn by lions.

Crete was the land which worshipped her to the greatest extent. Festivities always accompanied her worship, festivities of a rustic nature, with much drinking and dancing and eating.

As always the Greeks attached a beautiful tradition to the goddess. In order to explain the coming of winter and the change of seasons, they considered that originally Rhea had become enamoured of a youth named Atys. This young man proved faithless and was about to marry a nymph named Sagaris. Enraged Rhea broke in on the wedding whereupon Atys went mad at being caught in his faithlessness. Fleeing the ceremony he went to the mountains where he became mad, and committed suicide. Rhea realizing her lover was destroyed instituted a period of mourning for him—this mourning period being our winter.

* * *

AS YE SOW . . .

"AS YE sow, so shall ye reap," goes the biblical saying. It probably takes its origin in an early Greek legend which has certain beautiful elements about it.

On one occasion, Hermes accompanying Zeus, made a journey through the Greek region of Phry-

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gia. They sought hospitality everywhere, but everywhere they were rejected by the selfish people since they had disguised themselves as ordinary poor mortals. Finally they stumbled upon the cottage of two humble peasants, and old man Philemon and his wife Baucis. They possessed practically nothing but a bowl of milk and a crust of bread. Never the less they cordially invited their unknown but divine visitors to have a repast with them.

Discovering that their milk seemed ever replenished they realized that they had immortal visitors. Then Zeus and Hermes revealed themselves. They said they were going to punish the remaining villagers by destroying the town. This they did after taking Philemon and Baucis with them.

Then they offered the simple people any wish they desired. The two elected to serve the gods and upon their death they were changed into two lovely trees standing side by side forever. Greek mythology is threaded through and through with tales of divine intervention on such a simple scale as administering punishment for minor unkindnesses and so on. The Greeks saw the hands of the gods in everything, no matter how minute.

* * *

CINEMA FANTASY

THE French film, "Beauty and the Beast," employs an unusual technique to produce an aura of fantasy and horror. We are so familiar with hideous monsters and weird settings that it takes an unusual film indeed to strike any response in us. "Beauty and the Beast," however, succeeds in doing this very thing.

To begin with, the film is nothing more than a movie version of the familiar fairy tale of childhood. As such it calls for the usual settings of fantasy. The Beast, "La Bete," is a rather conventional monster along the "wolfman" lines. The story takes place in a weird chateau. It is here that the director exercised extraordinary imagination.

When "Beauty" enters the chateau for the first time, she enters a long hallway whose walls are lined with candelabra. The candelabra are supported by *human arms* projecting from the walls! The effect is unique, startling and horrifying. Later in the film a scene occurs in which a man sits down at a table from the center of which protrudes another human arm supporting a candelabra. As the man reaches to your himself a glass of wine, the arms sets the candelabra in a socket and personally performs the pouring ritual! The effect is terrific. All throughout the film, rare touches like these are used, always with good judgment and restraint. At no time do the fantastic elements detract from the story. Everything is in good taste. It would be well for our movie-makers to take a leaf from the Frenchman's book!

* * *

THE AVENGER

IT IS astonishing when one recalls the amount of influence that Greek mythology had on all languages, not excepting English. So many common English words stem from the Greek, usually through mythology that one is inclined to think that our language is made up of mythological words.

Consider "nemesis." This word is really the name of a Greek goddess, the daughter of Nyx. Nemesis was in charge of adjusting the balance in human affairs. At first she primarily deprived the unworthy of their ill-gotten gains and awarded the ones who merited it. But as the character of Greek mythology gradually changed she assumed more and more the role of the avenger, the goddess purely, in charge of punishing the wrongdoers.

For example, her ruthless method of punishment left nothing to be desired. Niobe a beautiful Earth-woman had a number of children of extreme beauty. So proud was she of these children that she blasphemously desired that her children and herself be worshipped as the gods. So enraged were Apollo and Zeus that through Nemesis, they slew all the children and turned Niobe into a weeping stone statue to remain so for all eternity! The statue of Nemesis is always a portrait showing her bearing a wheel, indicative of the speed with which she acts. She is also shown riding in a chariot drawn by griffins and carrying a sword—other symbols apropos to her are a rudder, a measure and a scale—probably the origin of Justice.

* * *

HELIOS

THE god of the Sun, was introduced, it is believed, from Asia. This probably is true when we consider the Persian obsession with fire- and sun gods. The Egyptian *Ra* is somehow herein connected also. Regardless, the Greeks regarded Helios, as not only the sun god, but the giver of life, the source of all heat and warmth.

As always the Greeks made poetic significance of what lesser peoples treated more prosaically. Helios rose every morning in the East. Preceding him was his sister, Eos, the Dawn, who painted the mountain tops with her rosy fingers. Then came Helios, driving a flame-darting chariot. The horses breathe fire and from Helios himself emanates radiant light and heat. No one can manage the fiery chariot except this youthful god, fearless and impressive.

In the evening, Helios cools his burning forehead in the waters of the western sea. Now he descends into the ocean to cool off, while in the distance another sister, Selene (the Moon) assumes command of the Heavens. Helios relaxes, surrounded by sea-nymphs, until on the morrow he will appear again. Selene bathes the world in her

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pale moon-glow.

Handsome Helios was loved by many. But he was quite fickle and he changed his love often. One lover, a nymph named Clytie, when spurned by Helios, stared up at the sun-god for nine days in all-consuming love, whereupon she became rooted in the Earth and is still remembered today as a flower which always keeps its faced turned toward the sun.

* * *

LADY LUCK!

WHAT is the nature of luck? First, what is luck? The answer to these questions is not easy to give. Learned scientists can give elaborate discussions of chance and probability. They will point out that in random occurrences certain statistical relationships can be observed. This is what they mean by the "Laws of Chance." The simplest example, that of the tossed penny indicates that if you flip a coin often enough it will come out heads half the time and tails the remaining half. But the trouble is, it can never predict which will come up on a given toss, no matter how often the coin is tossed.

What is the mysterious element that will allow one man to become pre-eminently successful as a gambler, and will allow another man to ruin himself overnight? Generally we say that one is "lucky." Yet we are no nearer an explanation of what this means.

In spite of the fact that strict probability precludes the possibility of anyone being luckier than another, we know from factual experiences that this is not true. We are all familiar with acquaintances and friends with whom we gamble, and we know those people to be extraordinarily good at winning, even in games which are pure chance. Are there some "gods," or is there a "fate" who watches over us and singles out the one on whom she will bestow her favors?

In spite of the primitive attitude lying therein, we are tempted at times to believe in it. Since chance negates every determined attitude we may have, it is only fair that we turn our backs on reason and worship at luck's shrine.

* * *

BABEL OF TONGUES

THE Earth is truly covered with a Babel of tongues. It is hard to estimate the numbers of different languages spoken all over the Earth, but they must at least number in the thausands. Generally the average student in our present-day schools becomes familiar at most with one or two modern foreign languages like French, German or Spanish—or Italian. Since all these languages are in reality very similar in basic structure and origin, he gets no picture of how really different languages like Chinese or Swahili are formed.

It is amazing indeed to consider how differently languages may be constructed. We who speak English are naturally, like any speaker of his native tongue, convinced that what we say is said in the simplest fashion possible.

Yet, when we consider Chinese, for example, we see a language which is basically much simpler than our own. True it has a terribly difficult script—ideographic in nature—but the language itself has *no* grammar! Can you imagine how simple this would be to learn. It has one drawback that can't be remedied however by changing to another script than the pictographic—it depends a great deal on tonal quality.

It has been said that an ideal language would combine the grammatic simplicity of Chinese with the great phonic simplicity of German. German is the most easily understood and the clearest spoken of foreign languages, but its grammar is very complex and archaic. With Chinese, it's the reverse—poor-sounding but very simple grammar structure. The two together would make an excellent single tongue!

* * *

OF GODS AND WINE

THE Greeks called him Dionysus, but he's better known under his Roman title, Bacchus. Officially he was the god of wine, but in general he was the complete personification of all the fruits of the Earth. Presumably Bacchus spent the better part of his childhood roaming at ease through the forest and it was here he came upon a vine, which when treated in a certain fashion yielded a "juice" with the strange property of inspiring exhiliration and merriments. When Bacchus discovered that this juice had such a pleasant effect on all who tasted it, he decided that it must be of great use to mankind, in helping it forget its sorrows. All over the world temples were set up in which to do honor to the creator of this noble gift, wine. And from these temples came eventually drunken orgiastic rites known as "Bacchanalia." In some of these ceremonies only women participated and men were absolutely forbidden.

It is in connection with Bacchus that the ancient legend of King Midas appeared. One of Bacchus' followers, Silenus, a satyr, was wandering around King Midas gardens, polluted to the gills. The kindly King Midas, seeing him, had him taken care of, watched over, and rested. When Bacchus found how well Midas had treated his friend, he offered him any boon he chose. Midas selected the ability to transform anything he touched into gold. We are all familiar with what followed. Soon Midas could neither eat nor drink, his daughter became a gilt statue, and even his bed became of hard gold. In despair he begged Bacchus to free him of his gift. Bacchus took pity on Midas and told him to bathe in a stream by the name of Pactolus. He did so and was freed of the curse, and that is why, it is charmingly related, that gold grains are found frequently in sandy river bottoms.

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READER'S PAGE

THE ONLY SURE MAGS

Sirs:

I have been reading FA and AS for nearly two years now. And I'd like to say that I think you've improved a lot in the past year.

Chet Geier is one of your best authors, as is Rog Phillips. Geier's "Sinbad" was very good, and you should continue to publish stories like this. Also, the caveman type. It seems that your longer stories are always better than the shorter ones. How about some better shorts?

And another thing, I would like to see a longer Reader's Page. I like to read the letters almost as much as I do the stories—and I would also have a better chance of getting a letter printed. . . .

Now to the stories in the January issue.

I've already commented on Geier's "Return of Sinbad," so we'll go on to the others.

"The Devil of Doom" was the only other really good story, but it was enough. Oh, yes, nearly forgot "Unforseen." Now that was good. It reminds me of the type we used to see in the old days. It was *very* good. "The Hammer on the Moon" I didn't care for.

Say, look, what ever happened to the 178 page size once proudly sported by FA? I realize that you've had trouble with printing and you could not publish the entire number of pages you used to, but that's all over now. Or was it just an excuse to stall, to lower the number of pages on us readers? Get your 178 pages back, there surely ought to be enough paper. Do you want to kill us for lack of stf? Why, don't you know that FA and AS are the only two stf magazines that come out on the date they're scheduled to? The only mags you can be sure of? Well, come then, and make it worth our while.

If I seem to be throwing brickbats, don't misunderstand me. I really like FA very much—I would like it if it were mimeoed on papyrus and dropped by parachute into a puddle of water.

So guess that about covers it for now.

W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Rd.
North Tonawanda, N. Y.

First of all, Paul, here's your letter, right smack at the head of the Reader's column, so you see you do stand a chance of getting in print! As to FA's reduced size, well old pal, we weren't giving you the old heave-ho business. What we said was, and still is, true. We just can't get our hands on the necessary amount of paper to go back to our old format—at least for the time being. You say that printing trouble is all over now and we should be able to get paper. Take our word for it, it just ain't so! But we're glad you pointed out that FA is never late on its sale date. We like to keep our readers satisfied in as many ways as possible—and rest assured we'll do our best to keep up the good work. .....Ed.

MIXING THEM UP

Sirs:

At the risk of seeing my own shadow, I climb out of my hole to drop you a line on the January issue of FA.

I have just finished reading it, and find that I can make the same criticism of FA that I made of AS. It looks like someone got the stories for the two magazines mixed up a trifle. AS printed three stories that were strictly fantasy, and now FA included three that are definitely stf.

"The Can Opener" by Rog Phillips is certainly a "gadget" story, and as such should have been in AS. "Hammer on the Moon" was a space opera that used an old theme. Possibly you thought it would not be so fresh in the minds of readers of FA? And "Unforseen" seems to me to be less of a fantasy and more of a science chronicle.

The stories themselves, however, were enjoyable. I wish to commend you on the high standard the magazine has this month. (I could say something about other months, but won't.)

Illustrations in the current issue seem to be much the same in composition. The best of the lot is, I think, Malcolm Smith's for "The Hammer on the Moon." I believe your artists should study Virgil Finlay more. . . .

Before closing, I would especially like to commend Chester S. Geier for his story, "The Return of Sinbad." His action is very often realistic and vivid . . . the plot is coherent, and the story, besides having the usual hero-wins-in-the-end finish, had the little twist of there being *no* twins at all, but just one luscious gal. (Nice and complicated, but she wouldn't have fooled me!)

Try and come up with some yarns of equal worth next month—and stick to fantasy.

Odin Thaanum
P. O. Box 2007
Cal. State Polytechnic Coll.
San Luis Obispo, Cal.

We must admit that the mixing up of stories, as you put it, was entirely premeditated! And we don't hang our head in shame. After all, you admitted they were good yarns, and certainly they

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were fantastic! (Or shall we say, possible, but not probable? . . .) A lot of readers have said they'd like to see a few more stf yarns in FA, and so we've bowed our editorial heads in complying with that wish. But don't worry, you'll still get terrific fantasy yarns—like Geier's story that you praised. We'll do our best to keep everybody happy...Ed.

SOME DEFINITE OPINIONS

Sirs:

Can I get in on a few of these discussions in the Reader's Section? I am a new reader and fan of FA, but I have a few denite opinions on some subjects under fire.

On the subject of Shaver and Lovecraft, I'd say that their writings are really not in the same field. HPL's works are wonderful, and Shaver, in his field is about as good as they come.

On the love interest, I say let's have all the love interest the authors want to put in their stories! Love interest has never spoiled any stories I've ever read. After all, there *are* two sexes, and the female of the species creeps up in everyday life!

All the stories in the December issue of FA were good, but not extra special. I was intrigued by the article, "The Magic Circle." There is a spot like that near Medford, Oregon, called "The Oregon Vortex."

Oh yes, I'd like to slip in a word of praise in FA if I may, for the swell cover on the December issue of AS. That was a beautiful piece of art work.

Mrs. Joyce Grissom
Rt. 1, Box 173
Talent, Ore.

You certainly may say a few words, Joyce. And we're mighty glad to welcome you into the fold. We're sure our other readers will find your comments interesting.....Ed.

ANOTHER VIEWPOINT

Sirs:

Some of the best stories I've ever read were stf tales with no love interest in them. All stories with heroines seem to me to be racy. They are liked stories, excellent, and very good. I'm not denouncing them, I'm only remarking—a viewpoint.

But stories without the gals in them are: slower moving, realistic, deeper, more sincere, truer to every-day life, and whereas the stories with gals in them are pleasant reading, they are more easily forgotten than those without. The male type story remains deeply in your memory.

I'm looking forward in FA, it being the best fantasy magazine on the market, for a pure fantasy tale with no gals in it. Perhaps in 60,000 A.D. Mr. Romeo Jilted Bachlornow, the editor of FA, will oblige me. . . . I hope the gals don't get sore —I like them as much as I ever did! So I'll close for now. . . .

George Andrews
8917 Cumberland Ave.
Cleveland, Ohio

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Well, now, George, we wouldn't exactly call ourselves a Romeo, or even jilted—but the Bachelor part is right—as yet. (Stand in line, girls!) As to the 60,000 A.D., who knows? Think we'll be around that long?.....Ed.

THE FILLERS ARE DILLERS

Sirs:

I have elevated myself from my comfortable position on the davenport to the desk to answer a remark I read in the Reader's Section, requesting an elimination of the fact articles you always include in FA.

I always read all the fact items, as I am sure that what was fiction before, is fact now. And I also feel that the items and stories you present that are listed as fiction will be fact some day.

In elaboration of all unknown facts being fiction, I might add that my work is converting electrical theory into electrical applied use in our every-day life. And what is more in the realm of the unknown than the question: "What is electricity?" Keep your fact features!

E. L. Kennion
109 6th Ave. East
Kennewick, Wash.

We agree with you wholeheartedly. So much that was called fiction only a few years ago is today accepted as fact. What about the atom bomb? And radar? And—but need we go on?.....Ed.

A LITTLE LATE, BUT . . .

Sirs:

This letter is a little late, but I just came across the story I want to rave about.

My brother and I own a complete collection of stf magazines since the first time we ever read one. But somehow, I missed reading a story in the May '48 issue of FA, and it was just recently brought to my attention. (I don't know why I missed it, as I always read the shorts, since I, like some people, find that my patience wears thin on long-length stories.)

Anyway, the yarn I'm speaking about was "My World Died Tonight," by Richard Casey. It was superb! A Casey masterpiece. I certainly hope to see more of this author's work in FA. I can't really call this story fantasy, it has too much depth and emotion. The author has a gifted pen. It was almost as if he had been writing a past experience. It was told with a sincerity that made me believe every word of it.

Now to get a bit up to date, I'd like to comment on your artists. I think that your best cover man is Bob Jones. He is the tops. This is one thing many magazines lack. A good cover. This simple, but important feature pulls your magazine head and shoulders ahead of all others.

John Ashton
525 Mapleton
Boulder, Colo.

We're always glad to publish a letter concerning a particularly good story of the past, and cer-

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tainly Dick Casey's yarn was a masterpiece, just as you stated. And thanks a lot for the kind words on our covers. We've always been mighty proud of the fact that the Ziff-Davis magazines have the best artists in the field. And we're glad to know that our readers feel the same way.....Ed.

ON NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES

Sirs:

I've been reading FA for several years. This is to tell you that I like the magazine. And I like stf for one reason: it is entertaining. Especially the case in your stories.

However, while your short fiction is highly entertaining, well-written, adult, and in some cases even conforming to "highbrow" standards, too many of your longer lengths are not adult, they are "laid on thick." They have the crude continuity of the dime novel, little characterization, and the science is lost in a thread of melodrama and forced plot machinations.

A story I read recently in FA has prompted me to write in on this subject. I had the feeling before, but this recent story was a particularly strong example of what I mean.

No man is able to say with certainty what is good and what is bad. He can only give an opinion. My opinion is that the authors should attempt to do better on their novel lengths. Perhaps his medium is a difficult one. Along these lines I never believed the old platitude about it being easier to write a novel than a short story. I think that is plain hokum. All that can be said is that fewer bad short stories are published, than novels. I believe the reason for this is that it is easier to create something good of small dimensions, rather than something good of large dimensions.

So while I applaud the authors of your short stories, I feel that you should do something about the men who write the novels for FA. Have them work a little harder, and maybe they'll be able to turn out a more convincing tale.

Wishing you well, and mentioning no names . . .

Robert L. Drazen,
1740 46th St.,
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Oh, come now, Bob, is that quite fair? Here you have aroused our editorial interest no end and you fail to mention names! How about letting us know just what stories you had in mind?

However, you have an interesting viewpoint on the difference between novels and short stories. But it's been our experience with authors that the short story is always the hardest to write. Because everything has to be so compact, to the point, and still finely done. But how about the rest of you readers? Any opinions on the subject?.....Ed.

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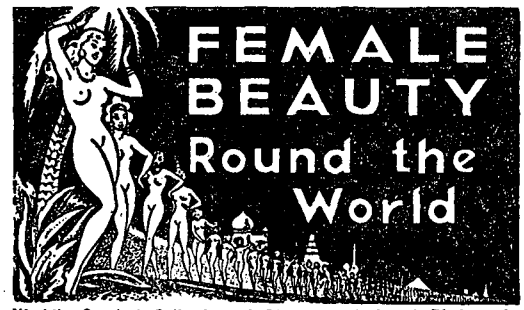

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UNDERWORLD LORD

★ By J. R. Marks ★

OF ALL the galaxy of Grecian and Roman gods, no one god was more feared or detested than Hades, or Pluto. Hades ruled that dim deep nether-world called Erebus. It was here that the souls of men were stolen by this heartless god. It was a funny characteristic of ancient Grecian beliefs so contrary to our own, that when one died, one descended into this hopeless nether-world to spend an eternity as a shade or shadow *without form or substance*, condemned to wandering in these regions without pleasure or hope.

Only the heroes and the gods were presumed to enjoy "life" after death. All others wasted away. Later on as the Greeks adopted a cheerier view of death, we find that Erebus becomes a much nicer world. In fact, Hades changes into a totally different god, Pluto, who was the god of riches, this idea evidently stemming from the fact that so much wealth was taken from the Earth in the form of minerals.

In Erebus, in the dominions of this new Hades were four huge rivers. Three of them had to be crossed by all who passed into the underworld. They were Acheron (Sorrow), Cocytus (Lamentation), and Styx (Intense Darkness). The spirits of the dead, the shades were ferried over the Styx by that grim boatman, Charon, who carried across only those who upon death had had a coin placed under their tongues to pay the toll into the Underworld. On the opposite side of the Styx was a judge, the Tribual of Minos who passed judgment on all who entered hell, and who consigned them to happiness or misery dependent upon what the confession of their deeds on Earth told him. Minos was protected by a three-headed monstrous dog, Cerberus, who prevented anyone from leaving Erebus, though he allowed all to enter.

Those spirits destined for happiness, were sent to the Elysian Fields where Hades and Persephone greeted them. Here in this paradise the worthy shades enjoyed everything they had previously enjoyed back on Earth.

After a thousand years in Elysium, the shades drank from the waters of the River Lethe (Oblivion), where they forgot who they were and reentered into the Earthly vale in new bodies, a sort of re-incarnation. Those shades which had had neither good nor bad lives, but only colorless ones, were sent to Asphodel, for a continuance of their monotonous, joyless life. The guilty souls were hurled into Tartarus, where all the torments of hell were realized. Tartarus was a region far beneath Hades. Here were found the giants and Titans who had offended the gods, as well as some of the lesser gods themselves, being punished for their violations of the heavenly code.

Here was Sisyphus, a tyrant king who murdered thousands. His punishment was to roll a

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huge rock to the top of a hill after great effort, whereupon, it rolled right down again and the process repeated itself indefinitely.

Here was Ixion, a Thessalian king who had presumed upon Zeus' friendship by making love to Hera. His punishment was to be fastened to a perpetually revolving wheel.

Here was Titys, a Giant who had insulted Hera, Zeus' wife. His punishment was to have his liver gnawed upon by two huge vultures.

Here was Tantalus, who had stolen nectar from the gods. His punishment was to be imbued with an enormous thirst. He was standing in water up to his neck, and whenever he bent to drink, the waters receded, leaving him in the perpetual agonies of thirst.

Here were the fifty Danaides, daughters of a king, who had murdered their husbands. Their punishment was to pour water into vessels full of holes, an endless and pointless task. The Romans adopted the worship of the Grecian Hades just as they did with so many other gods. They changed practically nothing, except that they called Erebus, Orcus, a vast cavern in the center of the Earth, a place of eternal gloom and hopelessness. Here their condemned souls were sent. The Romans, unlike the Greeks, erected no temples to this divinity. They also called Hades Pluto and Dis.

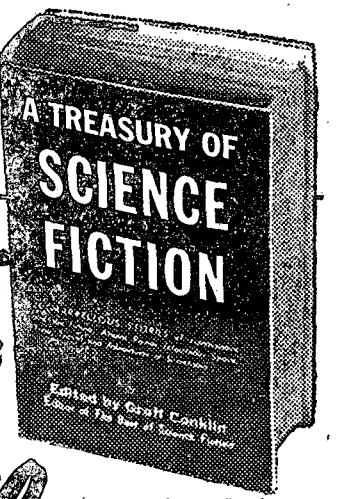
WISDOM'S GODDESS

☆ By Jom Barry ☆

FROM the ax-split skull of great Zeus, there sprang forth a goddess of such beauty and learning, as to make all others pale before her. Athene, or Pallas-Athene, to give her her full title, was the Goddess of Learning and Armed Resistance. Because she came forth wearing full armor she has often been considered a war-goddess. This is untrue. The armor is really a symbolic measure of her purity and unassailability. She never used her powers for anything but the aiding of justice and righteousness.

The "Pallas" part of her name comes from the Greek *pallo*—to swing—and that is what she did with her shield. She swung it in an impenetrable circle that warded off the attacks of her enemies. She was the favorite daughter of Zeus and he used her wherever he required a goddess whom he could rely on. She possessed many of his powers, among them, hurling thunderbolt, healing mortals, ability to gift one with prophesy, and in general had the authority of the great Zeus himself.

So far was she removed all war-like connotations that her especial duty was the care of the courts, the protection of earthly States, and the maintenance of order and law. She taught all the arts and sciences to the mortals. She fought on the side of the Greeks during the Trojan war. She introduced the wooden horse which became the cause of the downfall of Troy.



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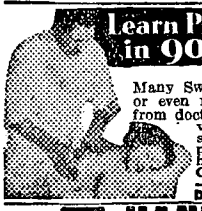

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She was proud of her ability. On one occasion she accepted a challenge by one of her students to engage in a weaving contest. As skilled as was Pallas-Athene, her pupil, Arachne bested her. This blow to her pride was too much for the goddess. She struck Arachne on the forehead and caused her to be changed in a spider. (Our generic word for spider today, in biology, is *arachnid*.)

Pallas-Athene was the inventor of the flute. It is said that she got the idea from the vanquished head of the Medusae. When the Medusae was killed, a sad dirge-like wail emanated from the mouths of the snakes who had once constituted the Medusae's hair. Pallas-Athene, hearing this melody enjoyed it and imitated it with reeds. The result was the flute.

Athene was worshipped everywhere in Greece, thought as patron of Athens, her power there was greatest. The most celebrated temple in the world was the Parthenon on the Acropolis which was dedicated to the worship of Pallas-Athene. It contained a statue of her, more than thirty-nine feet high. It was made of ivory and gold, and showed her standing erect, carrying spear and shield. At her feet lay a serpent. The olive tree was her symbolic representation in the plant world. It is said that she chose this because of its hardiness. It had the ability to recover even under the most trying circumstances. When the Persians destroyed the olive groves after they had sacked Athens, and burned it, the tree grew forth green shoots at once.

As always the Romans appropriated Pallas-Athene, giving her the name Minerva. Her accomplishments were similar to the Greek goddess'. It is interesting to note that of all the vast hierarchy of Roman gods, the only ones worshipped in the Capitol, were Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. This gives some idea of the veneration in which she was held.

SEANCE-SCIENCE?

★ **By L. A. Burt** ★

OF ALL metaphysical phenomena, none has been more lavishly discussed than the seance. Probably this is so because no other phase of mysticism so readily lends itself an air of mystery and glamor. True, experiments in mind-reading, in general telepathy, etc. are interesting to consider, but it is the seance itself which provides the most unusual picture of metaphysical activities.

Seances are generally conducted by mediums, persons who are sensitive to the strange impulses that seem to come to them from a mysterious other-world. The seance is generally conducted in an unlit room, in the center of which is a table and around which the persons in attendance, including the medium, sit. Each medium has her own technique for establishing a state of rapport

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between herself, her attendants, and the other-world. Often during the course of a seance, a mysterious substance is seen to emanate from some portion of the medium's body. This "ectoplasm" has never really been understood. It is a material substance like water or smoke? Persons, reliable witnesses, have reported that they have touched the ectoplasm and found it to be a substance much like an oily dough.

Any efforts to preserve this material have failed. One of the problems involved here, is to obtain a truly objective picture of the whole affair. So many mediums have employed deliberate fakery that they have cast a bad name on the legitimate ones. Thus it is almost impossible to gather a series of genuine case histories of these phenomena.

Several prominent investigators of the realm of the psychic have offered not only large sums of money, but sincere scientific interest in the motivations behind mediums and their seances. Rarely has anything come of this. Houdini, the great magician, many times attempted to study psychic phenomena during the seance, almost invariably without effect.

Fortunately, today, a number of prominent scientists have taken a serious interest in the matter of psychic manifestations. They are devoting time and effort to the study of the subject. Because they are scientists, they will make a particularly honest effort to isolate the trickery and fakery from the genuine. It is their intention to use photography, electronic apparatus and all the other appurtenances of the modern laboratory to get clear accurate data on these weird happenings, and to determine to just what extent they are reliable.

Dr. Rhine's experiments in mental telepathy have proven beyond the shadow of a doubt that there is a great deal of factual and truthful matter in the realm of the mind. He has made an extremely deep study of the subject and has shown it to be real. If others will take the same pains in other phases of mystic phenomena, we can be sure, eventually, that we are getting the truth and not trickery.

* * *

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COMING OF MAN

★ **By June Lurie** ★

THE legendary accounts of the origin of man according to mythology, would not stand well with modern science, but they are much more beautiful and poetic than the cold accounts of the scientists.

The early Greeks attributed Man's coming as a growth from the Earth itself. Man sprang full-grown from the earth in the Spring, just as the plants do. But as he existed, he was just like any wild animal, any beast in the field. The gods gradually taught him the rudiments of civilization. But as time went on, man degenerated until eventually the gods resolved that he must be destroyed. Two mortals were saved from an all-enveloping flood that wiped out man—Deucalion and his wife, Pyhrra.

It is interesting to note the similarity here to the biblical legend. The flood lasted nine days and of all man, only Deucalion and Pyhrra survived in the boat they had built. This boat landed on Mount Olympus when the flood subsided. They decided to renew man and when they asked the oracle at Themis how to recreate the world of mankind, they were told to hurl the bones of Mother Earth (Rhea) over their shoulders. Understanding this to mean, the stones, they did so, from which full-grown men sprang up.

All through-out Greek legend we find man appearing during the course of three ages, the Golden, the Silver and the Brazen Age. The Golden Age was a time of complete ease and happiness on Earth and when it finished the people went to Hades with no regret or sorrow. The Silver Age was one of soft ease and decadence. The Brazen Age produced battle and war on Earth. Surrounded by brass and bronze tools and weapons man started to war among his kind. Themis, the goddess of justice became so disgusted with man's behavior, that she fled back to Olympus among the gods. Finally Zeus sent the Brazen Age men back to Hades too.

The Iron Age was the time when the Earth no longer yielded things without intense work. Since Themis had fled, there was no justice and men engaged in nothing but sin and destruction. This is when Zeus destroyed all men but Deucalion and Pyhrra. There were other variations on the origin of man too, but they differ in not too much from the fore-mentioned.

Some beautiful imagery accompanies these legends. For example, Prometheus befriended mankind and in spite of Zeus' refusal to give mankind the gift of fire, Prometheus smuggled some sparks from the Sun in a tube which he delivered to mankind. Zeus, angry at being outwitted, punished mankind by sending to the Earth a lovely woman made of clay and endowed with all the virtues and beauty which could be imagined. Epi-

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metheus, a common man, fell in love with and married this lovely woman, Pandora. He warned Pandora that she must not touch one of his possessions, a mysterious box. As we all know, she could not restrain her curiosity. She opened the box, and all the gifts of the gods fled man, except one which remained in the chest whose lid was closed just in time. It was the gift of Hope which enabled man to withstand all the ills that engage him.

Zeus was still not done. He had to punish Prometheus. He had the god chained to a rock on Mount Caucausus, and every day he sent an eagle to gnaw away on Prometheus' liver. For thirty years this horrible punishment went on. Finally Heracles killed the eagle and Prometheus was freed.

An interesting side-light may be considered when thinking of Pandora. When she was created the various gods gave her different qualities. Thus Hermes (Mercury) gave her a persuasive tongue, Aphrodite gave her beauty, The Graces gave her fascination, and Athene enabled her to be pleasing. Pandora means all-gifted—and note that she had everything that woman should have—but she had to be cursed with that insatiable curiosity that still seizes the sex today!

ROCKET BASE

★ **By A. Morris** ★

THIS magazine has often proposed stories in which the Moon is used as a base for the launching of projectiles against the Earth. The possibility makes beautiful subject matter for science-fiction writers. But the thing is going beyond the realm of mere fantasy.

R. S. Richardson, an astronomer of national repute, proposes this very thing in a current national magazine. He points out that a very determined nation, with the technical facilities now at hand, could set up a base on our satellite, a base which could be equipped with the devices necessary for the launching of projectiles—rockets—whose warheads would be formed by atomic bombs.

Then, these masters of the Moon could leisurely launch their deadly weapons at the major cities of the Earth with devastating effect. The results would, of course, be ghastly. As the Earth rotated beneath them, they could select the cities to be destroyed, calculate the trajectories of their rockets, launch them, and watch the cities of the Earth vanish, one by one. beneath the impact of the terrifying atomic bombs.

It is possible too, that all the initial setting-up of the base could be done in complete secrecy. For the sake of appearances, an aggressor could bombard its own territory to divert suspicion. And by the time detection occurred it would be too late!

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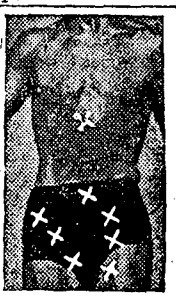

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OLYMPIAN TIMEKEEPER

By Marty Mesner

CRONUS, the Greek god of time, known to the Romans as Saturn was supposed to have dethroned his father Uranus and assumed control of the universe. Through marriage with Rhea he produced a host of offspring whose names are difficult to keep straight primarily because of the confusion between Greek and Roman terminology. In almost all mythology there are two names for every god or goddess. Thus his children were Aides (Pluto), Poseidon (Neptune), Zeus (Jupiter), and three girls, Hestia (Vesta), Demeter (Ceres), and Hera (Juno), and more.

Cronus was a worry-wort. Afraid that his children might overthrow him, he swallowed them as soon as they were born—a neat tie-up with the poetic assertion that *"time* destroys all things." However through the intercession of Rhea, one of the children, Zeus, was saved.

Zeus was secretly educated and developed into a masterful god who eventually determined to overthrow his father. He used guile to force his father to disgorge the swallowed children. Enraged Cronus brought matters to a head and a fierce war ensued between Zeus aided by Titans, Oceanus and other gods who had fled Cronus' oppressions, and Cronus. Fearfully the battle raged offering victory to neither until Zeus finally called upon an imprisoned band of Giants, among them the Cyclops, each with an eye in the middle of his forehead, the Steropes, who handled lightning, and Pyracmon, the fire-anvil god. With these tremendous forces and after a long and intensive war Zeus won and made himself master of the heavens, residing all the while on Mount Olympus. Cronus was banished from the kingdom, but being immortal, he was forced to live in perpetual banishment. Zeus then, as we all know now, assumed his Father's mantle and ruled with a fair amount of justice. Cronus is always pictured as an old man leaning on a scythe and carrying an hour-glass. The hour-glass symbolizes the eternal fleeting of time, while the scythe symbolizes the nature of time itself which mows down everything before it, unfailingly and irreparably.

It is necessary to admire the beautiful symbolism selected by the Greeks in their choice of gods. What could be more effective than Cronus to stand for time. The name of the god lingers in our speech in *chronometer, synchronize* and many other words.

* * *

Christ. God, Man or Myth?

Did Christ himself write down any record of His life? If so, where are these writings today? Do they exist in any museum or library or sacred shrine? Can you find a trace of them in the vast and mysterious subterranean archives of the Vatican in Rome? The answer is NO! Nowhere has any man been able to discover a single word that Jesus wrote!

Who, then, wrote the Christian Gospels? And when were they written? By some historian after the death of Christ? Or are these Gospels merely myths and legends handed down to us from a civilization that existed long before the time of Christ?

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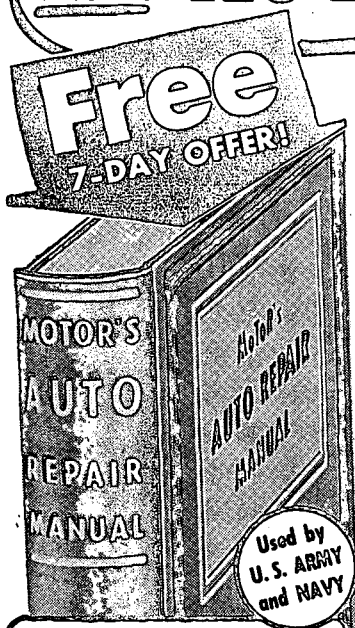

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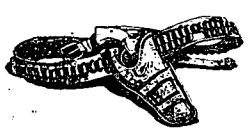

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